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ABSTRACT

The Viburnum Foundation, a family foundation based in New York, is currently in the fifth year of giving grants to rural library-sponsored family literacy programs in Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The libraries involved in the Viburnum Family Literacy Project are in areas with high levels of poverty and illiteracy. The programming, which usually takes place at a library, a Head Start Center, or a school, may include parenting classes for adults, adult literacy and English as a Second Language instruction in classrooms and by tutors, storytelling and reading aloud to children exclusively or for all generations, and bilingual programming for adults and children. This report discusses what makes library-based family literacy programs work, and how policymakers, grantmakers, and community leaders can collaborate to promote family literacy in rural areas. Following an introduction, the body of the report is divided into six main sections in terms of the following topics and subtopics: 1) the rural library as a site for family learning and the rural community as a site for social change; 2) program staff and participants; 3) partnerships; 4) programs (planning, budgeting and spending, program design, content and activities, impacts); 5) grantmaking issues; and 6) critical areas of change. A concluding chapter reiterates the reasons why libraries and literacy programs are critical to the health of society, and outlines difficult challenges to be faced in the near future. Appendices present a Viburnum Foundation project history and list of Viburnum sites. (AEF)

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FROM THIBODAUX TO TUCUMCARI:

FAMILY LITERACY IN RURAL LIBRARIES

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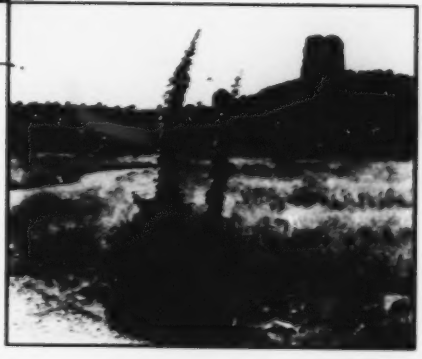

A REPORT FROM THE VIBURNUM FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

BY MOLLY TURNER AND NANCY KOBER

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REPORT SUMMARY

The Viburnum Foundation, a family foundation based in New York, is currently in the fifth year of giving grants to rural library-sponsored family literacy programs in Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. As of September, 1997, the Foundation has made fifty-nine grants of $3,000 each.

The libraries involved in the Viburnum Family Literacy Project are in areas with high levels of poverty and illiteracy. The programming, which usually takes place at the library, a Head Start Center, or a school, may include parenting classes for adults, adult literacy and ESL instruction in classrooms and by tutors, storytelling and reading aloud for children exclusively or for all generations, and bilingual programming for adults and children.

This report discusses what makes library-based family literacy programs work, and how policy makers, grantmakers, and community leaders can collaborate to promote family literacy in rural areas. These are our principal findings:

- Libraries are a natural location for family literacy programs, since library buildings, resources, and atmosphere are all well-suited to family activities and to reading and books. In a rural community, the library is often the only public institution available for intergenerational learning.

- Library-based literacy programs in rural areas provide benefits for both libraries and citizens, and have many positive impacts on both adults and children in the community.

- Small amounts, such as Viburnum's $3,000 grants, can be very effective and useful to rural libraries, which are accustomed to operating on a shoestring and often don't have the resources required to qualify for larger grants.

- Through partnerships with Head Starts, community colleges, volunteer organizations, and other agencies, rural libraries can overcome many staffing and funding limitations, and provide more literacy services than they could alone.

- Libraries in rural areas face special challenges in publicizing their literacy programs, recruiting participants, and keeping participants involved. Librarians need more training and resources from the state, the federal government, and the private sector.

- The most successful literacy programs show creativity and flexibility in program design, willingness to learn from mistakes, and sensitivity to all the needs of the community.

- The Viburnum Family Literacy Project makes a difference on the local grassroots level while also advancing the cause of literacy and libraries on the state and federal policy level.

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FAMILY LITERACY IN RURAL LIBRARIES

BY MOLLY TURNER AND NANCY KOBER

A REPORT OF THE VIBURNUM FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

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The research and writing of this report were paid for by the Viburnum Foundation.

Preface

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress was established in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and libraries. Currently the center's national reading promotion network includes 34 affiliated state centers and more than 50 national civic and educational organizations.

Family literacy has been a strong Center for the Book interest since 1991, when hundreds of projects across the nation were encouraged during the center's "Year of the Lifetime Reader" national reading promotion campaign. The results are available in the center's publication *Developing Lifetime Readers* (1993).

More recently, through its Library-Head Start Museum partnership project, funded by Head Start from 1992-96, the center encouraged family literacy partnerships in local communities throughout the United States. The sponsorship of Gail Spangenberg's study, *Even Anchors Need Lifelines: Public Libraries in Adult Literacy* (1996), available from the center, provided new perspectives on public library literacy programs.

The Center for the Book is pleased to be a new partner in the Viburnum Foundation's Family Literacy Project. As outlined in this report, the Viburnum Family Literacy Project focuses on small grants to rural libraries as part of a long-term strategy for family literacy. It creates and presents new opportunities for overcoming illiteracy at the community level. We look forward to the important work ahead.

-John Y. Cole, Director
The Center for the Book, Library of Congress

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Foreword: About the Viburnum Foundation

The Viburnum Foundation has been involved with funding public libraries since it was begun by the Turner family in 1989. The first task of the board was to find a focus for the foundation that was compatible with all of the geographic, philosophical, and political viewpoints of different family members. We quickly settled on libraries because we all treasure both books and public buildings, and because we had library connections who could guide us through the learning stages of grantmaking.

At first we weren't quite as excited about libraries as we are now. As do most Americans, we took them for granted, and thought of them as rather staid institutions that play a useful but marginal role in American society. But once we got to thinking about public libraries, and what they mean to American society, and how they can work as building blocks in a community, we became ardent library advocates. Where else is there universal, free public access, no strings attached? Where else can anyone off the street tap into the Internet to find a job, or a national discussion about health care issues? Where else can adults and children come together to experience the world of learning in a free, safe, democratic environment?

As our relationship with libraries evolved, we found ourselves thinking more and more about the mission of the library in American society, and about how that mission could be reinterpreted and reinvigorated. We discovered that non-local philanthropic support for libraries has been virtually nonexistent since the days of Andrew Carnegie,* and we began to realize that even a small or mid-size foundation might play a pivotal role in broadening awareness of libraries and library programs, among the public, among other funders, and among policymakers. This report—an attempt to put our annual grantmaking decisions into a broader social context—represents our first step toward exploring this role.

From the beginning, our interest in libraries was as a *public* space, and we selected grant programs that sought to strengthen and multiply the connections between libraries and the public. Viburnum has supported public awareness of libraries through our grants to the New York Library Association, which has developed and implemented training in advocacy and media relations for librarians, trustees, and friends of the library. NYLA's approach to advocacy has been used or adapted for use around the country.

A Viburnum grant to Libraries for the Future in 1995 and 1996 supported a series of forums for grantmakers and library leaders in New York, Chicago, and Seattle. Moderated by *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham, these forums were an attempt to open up a dialogue between libraries and foundations, and pave the way for more support of libraries from the philanthropic community. In 1998, with Viburnum support, Libraries for the Future will be starting up the Community Library Advocacy Project to develop, support, and connect community-based advocacy coalitions in eight

* See "Philanthropy and the Public Library: Retrospect and Prospect," a research brief by Linda Kravitz, Diantha Schull, and William Zeisel, published by Libraries for the Future, 1996.

states, as the first phase in a longer-term national initiative.

In an ideal society, the main pursuit of philanthropy would be the enhancement of everyday lives. Taxes would raise enough money to cover the essentials, including education and arts and social programs, and foundations would have nothing to do but support creative visions and reward the deserving. However, in our less than ideal society, we find the philanthropic community called upon to help provide the basic elements of survival in the modern world: food, shelter, health, employment, education, and citizenship. In responding to that call, grantmakers need to weigh their options carefully, considering the ramifications of support for organizations that may have been or will be eligible for public funding. Will foundation grants give these organizations an opportunity to demonstrate their worth and attract more community and public support, including government funding, or will they make them dependent upon the whims of private funders with private agendas?

At the Viburnum Foundation, we hope that our grants give our grantees room to grow, and opportunities to broaden their base of support. By providing support to libraries, we hope to strengthen and stabilize them so that they can provide essential services to their communities whether or not they get adequate funding from their communities or the federal government. And through providing support to libraries, we are getting the most out of our philanthropic dollar, by contributing to both the infrastructure and its enhancements at the same time.

The idea for the Viburnum Family Literacy Project evolved from our interest in expanding both the public's engagement with the library, and the library's engagement with the public, especially in rural areas with high poverty and low literacy levels. This report shows how libraries in such areas can and do build effective literacy programs that reach out to underserved population groups. Some of these programs represent very tiny steps toward improving community life, while others, we think, are breaking new ground in their approach to intercultural and intergenerational learning. We urge other funders and policymakers to take note of the virtually unlimited resources for lifelong learning that exist in the public library, and to provide community libraries and literacy councils with the funding and support needed to build from those resources.

—Molly Turner, Executive Director

INTRODUCTION:
THE VIBURNUM FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

1. The Grant Project

The Viburnum Foundation, a family foundation based in New York and Virginia, is currently in the fifth year of giving $3,000 grants to library-sponsored family literacy programs in rural Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The Viburnum grants, henceforth referred to as the Viburnum Family Literacy Project, began in 1992 when the Foundation made a grant to the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) of the American Library Association (ALA) to administer the project. OLOS created the application, selected the applicants, and provided training to prospective grantees for the first four years of the program, and Viburnum made direct grants to the rural libraries selected by OLOS (forty-three grants over four years). Viburnum's partnership with ALA/OLOS ended in 1996. In 1997 Viburnum awarded a three-year $525,000 grant to the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress to design and administer a new, expanded Viburnum Family Literacy Project. Of the yearly grant award of $175,000, $100,000 will go directly to rural libraries and literacy programs in 1998, 1999, and 2000.

2. The Project Evaluation

The following report is the result of research conducted by Tracy Kerr and Nancy Kober, independent consultants, and Molly Turner, Executive Director of the Viburnum Foundation, from January to July 1997. On two different trips, we visited eleven sites in Louisiana, Mississippi, and New Mexico. During our site visits we spent many hours with librarians and literacy coordinators, and also talked with instructors, volunteers, partners, and program participants. In addition to our site visits we conducted telephone interviews with all current eighteen VFLP libraries, plus four additional sites from previous years, and we mailed out questionnaires. We also interviewed state library and state literacy personnel in each of the five states.

The primary goals of our research were to gather as much information as possible about past and current grantees in order to evaluate and revise the grant program; to provide some empirical examples for

policymakers and funders about how rural communities can work together to promote literacy; to write a report publicizing the work of our grantees and promoting library-based family literacy; and to share information and ideas among grantees and other libraries involved in family literacy.

In evaluating the grant project, we looked for impacts on the libraries, the library staff, and the community as well as on the literacy program participants. Although these impacts are abstract and difficult to quantify, in our view they are more significant than the so-called "performance benchmarks" or "standards" that are the requirements of many literacy grant programs. Performance benchmarks are useful to funders because they provide an easy structure for the distribution of grant money. But statistics are difficult to gather, and harder still to interpret in the area of family literacy. For many adult learners, progress is slow and incremental; and for children, the effects may not be visible until years later. We feel that it is more important and more beneficial in the long term for librarians and their community partners to build a creative program tailored to the specific needs and goals of their area, than it is to build a program around a set of standards imposed by a foundation. Therefore Viburnum grants are relatively unrestricted.

With all of this in mind, please note that this is a qualitative report, using ethnographic rather than statistical data to inform our findings about rural libraries and literacy. We were researching the community of librarians and literacy providers, and our report is based in part on their voiced and written opinions, as well as on the documentation from their programs, plus our own observations from discussions with them over the phone or during site visits. We hope through this process to give you a glimpse of what it's like to be a librarian or a literacy provider in a rural community in one of these five states. Please note, also, that our observations and findings are not limited to activities, programs, or sites funded specifically with Viburnum grants. We will try to mention all of the good ideas and successful models that we encountered during our research, whether they were in a library, a community college, a Head Start center, or a literacy council.

3. The Library Programs

Bilingual Family Night in Tucumcari, New Mexico

In Tucumcari, New Mexico, Library Director Clara Rey recognized several needs in the community that could be addressed through a single program. On the one hand, there were Anglo residents who wanted to improve their Spanish, because they had coworkers, family members, or clients who spoke Spanish. There were also many Hispanic residents who grew up with English as their first language, and who wanted to get back the language of *la familia* for themselves and for their children. And there were Spanish-speaking residents, both older New Mexicans and recent Mexican immigrants, who wanted to practice speaking English. The library's Viburnum-supported program brought adults and children, both English and

Spanish-speaking, to a bilingual family night, with games, storytelling, and other learning activities conducted in both languages. One night, for example, the whole group made tortillas.

At each session, there were several different versions of language being negotiated around the big table. The Mexican nationals who were participating in the program used many words and idioms that were unfamiliar to New Mexican Spanish speakers, and when the local Anglo participants applied their Tucumcari twangs to Spanish, yet a third version of the language was invented. This constant translation, combined with the fact that the room was also filled with children, made for a somewhat chaotic atmosphere. But there was learning going on in Tucumcari, not only about language but about culture, family, and community.

The bilingual Family Night is only one of the Tucumcari library's many literacy activities; the library also has a tutoring program, a wide selection of Laubach materials for library and home use, book distribution to new mothers in hospitals and homebound people, an incentive reading program, computers, and videos. The library director has designed the family literacy programming, including outreach and publicity strategies, with the help of Chris Turnbeaugh, the Title I Parent Liaison for the Tucumcari school system, who is paid a small stipend through the Viburnum grant.

Family Storytime in Assumption Parish, Louisiana

For Family Storytime in Assumption Parish, the library invited families to its main branch in Napoleonville to listen to a few different thematically-related stories presented by a storyteller. On one night, for example, there was a swamp theme, with decorations and murals representing bayou life. The storyteller dressed up as an alligator and read the stories aloud while the audience—sixty children and adults—followed along in books spread out on the floor. One of the books was a tale about a Cajun environmentalist named Ti Nonc, by a local author named Elvis Cavalier. Since the book focused on recycling, afterward the children gathered together to make hats out of recycled materials, while the parents, in another room, attended a workshop on parenting skills.

In trying to keep up the family literacy program—which is strapped for staff, time, space, and money—the librarians alternate between purchasing materials and offering scheduled activities and programming. In the 1997-98 year the Assumption Parish Library will be spending its Viburnum grant on colorful packets for families to take home and read together. The packets will contain two board books, two storybooks, pamphlets with tips on reading to children, bookmarks, read-along tapes, and a book with ideas about parent-child activities. Mary Judice, the library's director, said that she and the library's board made a decision to focus on quality rather than quantity—meaning that they will try to build one program successfully before branching out into new areas. The library has a strong Friends of the Library group, a dynamic staff, and a close-knit community that enthusiasti-

cally endorses and participates in library programming.

Family History Night in El Rito, New Mexico

The village of El Rito is located in a remote mountainous part of northern New Mexico known for both its beauty and its poverty. In one room of Las Clinicas del Norte, the public health clinic, is El Rito's library. The library's director, Ginger Legato, is the only employee. Her duties (she is paid for thirty hours a week) include building maintenance as well as grantwriting and book circulation.

For its first foray into literacy activities, with a $3000 Viburnum grant in 1995-96, the library purchased a set of easy reading books related to Southwest history and culture, and sponsored "Family History Night," where local residents shared family histories that they had gathered and written together. With its next grant, the library will continue to build its program, collaborating with other regional literacy providers and the statewide literacy council to gather training materials and build a volunteer base. A strong local interest in genealogy has prompted the library to plan a series of evening lessons about how to research and create a family tree. The one computer in the library is enormously popular, especially among younger residents, and the library plans to incorporate it into literacy activities, with children training adults. Finally, the library is planning a project with a local artist to help participants make their own books, using Viburnum funds as well as a grant from the New Mexico Arts Commission.

Tucumcari is a town of about 7000 people in eastern New Mexico, located on the old Highway 66 and Interstate 40, and one of the few commercial centers in the many vast miles of open space between Amarillo and Albuquerque. Its public library is funded by the city. Assumption Parish, according to its librarian, is a "labyrinth of lakes, rivers, marshes, and swamps," with a population of 23,000, located south of Baton Rouge. Napoleonville, where the main parish library is located, is a town of only 800 people, and branch libraries are located in the even smaller hamlets of Labadieville and Pierre Part, where French is the first language of many residents. El Rito is a village of 1,500 in a largely Hispanic region, and its tiny, privately funded library serves forty different far-flung communities. The three communities are very different from one another, but alike in some ways: all have many residents who speak a language other than English, and all have many residents living below the poverty line. All three also have a dynamic library and literacy staff and community residents who value their library and participate in its programming. The Viburnum grants have helped build sustainable family literacy programs that use the resources of the community while addressing its needs.

These three examples give some sense of the diversity of Viburnum grant sites and the range of programming that libraries offer under the rubric of "family literacy." In this report we will take a look at the family literacy

Key Features of Effective Family Literacy Programs

One of the primary goals of our study was to identify the basic ingredients of a successful library-based literacy program. Here is a quick summary of what we found:

- **Dedicated librarians and literacy coordinators.** Successful program administrators work many extra hours as advocates for literacy with library boards, politicians, program participants, volunteers, and community partners.
- **Motivated participants.** The programs work because the participants want to learn.
- **Dedicated volunteers.** Libraries and literacy programs are dependent on volunteers to help with most aspects of program design and implementation.
- **Flexible program design.** Staff members are always ready to revise a plan, respond to feedback from program participants, or incorporate new and creative ideas.
- **Good program content.** Effective programs use high-quality books, innovative software, good consultants, teachers, storytellers, and tutors, and proven teaching methods.
- **Transportation and child care.** The best programs find ways of bringing people in, and have child care for younger children.
- **Thoughtful and creative outreach and publicity.** Good programs know their audiences and use strategic planning to publicize their programs and reach their target groups.
- **Strong support from library board.** The library leadership and the board agree that literacy is an important part of the public library's mission, and the board backs up this belief with funding and supportive policies.
- **Strong support from the community.** The literacy program is valued by area citizens, businesses, and governmental entities, who show their support with dollars and in-kind donations.
- **Effective mechanisms for collaboration.** Program staff know how to coordinate resources and responsibilities with other local agencies and institutions which serve the same population.
- **Creative fund-raising.** Program staff have learned that you seldom receive what you don't ask for, and they look anywhere and everywhere for money and in-kind contributions.
- **Sense of limits.** Program staff who depend on outside funding for operations learn to scale down ambitious visions, and build programs slowly and deliberately. "It's easy to bite off more than you can chew."

programs funded by Viburnum grants from several different angles. First, in the "Places" section, we will look at how family literacy has developed as a sensible and effective way for libraries to provide literacy programming, and what is needed for libraries to adapt the idea of family literacy most usefully. Next we will discuss some of the common features of rural American communities in the South and Southwest, and how the library fits into these communities. In the "People" section we will talk about the staff, volunteers, and program participants. The "Partners" chapter will describe how libraries collaborate on Viburnum programs with other community agencies and institutions, and the "Programs" chapter will examine the process of planning and developing a family literacy program. The section on "Grantmaking Issues" will look at the grant project from the foundation's point of view, and discuss different ways that foundations can work to promote literacy. "Critical Areas of Change" will look at the big-picture issues that affect library programming, such as technology funding, welfare reform, and state literacy policies.

PLACES

"There's a comfort factor in the library; people expect to find help there."
—A literacy council director in Louisiana

1. A Site for Family Learning: The Rural Library

Family literacy is a relatively new idea that brings together concepts about learning and interaction among both children and adults. Adult literacy practitioners haveknown for a long time that the prospect of sharing learning with one's child or grandchild is a prime motivator for illiterate adults to become literate. It also is clear that many literate adults are not sure how best to help their children learn. And since children need reinforcement at home for classroom learning, it makes sense to establish a learning environment for both adults and young children together.

"True" family literacy—which includes adult literacy, parenting education, early childhood education, and joint parent-child learning activities—is complex and difficult to achieve, especially in a context where the available staff are librarians, not teachers. But many librarians have a vision of families learning together in a room full of books, and they're willing to do whatever they have to do to make that vision a reality. The Viburnum Family Literacy grants are small and unstructured. The small size of the grants translates into less pressure on the libraries to come up with elaborate programming, and the lack of structure in most cases leads to appropriately tailored program designs based on the needs and resources of the community. Most Viburnum programs do not achieve all of the components of family literacy right off the bat, but they raise awareness about the importance of family literacy, and they make it possible for community leaders to think about other ways to provide literacy services for both adults and children.

Placing family literacy within the context of the library makes sense for a variety of reasons. First of all, most public libraries have children's programming already in place, and one of the principle advantages of *family* literacy programs is the ability of children to pull in adults who otherwise might not get involved in literacy activities. Children often serve as icebreakers, making it easier for adults to communicate with one another. The social stigmas that often attach to adult literacy (and which can be especially stifling in rural communities, where everyone knows each other) can be diminished by turning the teaching hour into a fun family activity in the neutral environment of the library.

The public library, for a century or more, has provided space for adults *and* children, unlike K-12 schools or adult education venues like community colleges. The library is generally centrally located, comfortable, climate-controlled, equipped with restrooms and telephones, handicapped accessible, and safe. The books, pictures, and educational materials all around enhance the learning environment, and it is a *different* learning environment from the school where an adult may have failed as a younger student. It is clearly designed for the adult as well as for the child, in terms of facilities and overall atmosphere.

And of course the library makes sense as a location for literacy learning because it's where the books are. After one visit to the library, the learner can be a member, a user, a participant, for the rest of his or her life. The learner can grow from using children's books to reading the daily newspaper, the latest novel, or an engineering text. There are no limits on learning at the library.

Also, libraries are repositories not only of books and information, but of very important human resources—librarians—who are specially trained to help other people, both children and adults. They move fluidly from telephone to computer to reference book, from acting out a mythical beast in a children's story hour to tutoring English as a Second Language, from ordering refreshments to ordering books and software. In rural libraries, they often can be found mopping a floor or painting a ceiling. Their mission is to make and maintain connections between their patrons and the ever-changing world. Because of this mission they are well-suited to the task of promoting intergenerational literacy in a variety of contexts.

Even if a library is very small, and lacking in resources and staff, there are many cases where a need exists to improve or increase literacy that can be filled quite easily by willing volunteers with minimal supervision. For example, many young parents who are literate do not think of reading aloud to their young children, or do not know how to read in a way that will help their children prepare for classroom activities. Here is where a library-based family literacy program can play a useful role that does not require specialized training or materials. A family literacy program can demonstrate different methods of reading to children, while also providing a regular time for parent-child interaction, and an opportunity for both generations to enjoy and explore the library.

Libraries often serve not only as family gathering places, but as community centers. A library's plans to bring families together for learning often reflect the wishes of community members to spend more time together as families and as neighbors. As library director Ginger Legato describes it:

> In our small rural community of El Rito, New Mexico, the sustaining of the family unit is most important in people's lives. Families have a sense of history that is their wealth and pride. Families are large and extended, and include grandparents, very often great-grandparents, parents, children, aunts and uncles and cousins all living in close geographic proximity to each other. The 1995-96 Viburnum grant provided us with funding that helped tap into this richness as a means to advance literacy skills. Family History evenings were coordinated at the library and elders were able to share their

stories with children, friends, and neighbors.

In working toward a more literate community, libraries of course are serving their own interests as well as those of their patrons. An increase in readers means an increase in library circulation, and in recent years librarians have come to realize more and more that development of literacy is an essential part of the library's role. As one librarian in Louisiana said, "If we don't keep literacy in the forefront, we just might be out of business." In recent years the American Library Association has been instrumental in helping libraries work toward expanding literacy activities, as have the various State Literacy Resource Councils established by the federal Adult Education Act. As librarians work more as or with literacy providers, they begin to build time in their schedules and space in their facilities for literacy activities. While most librarians have neither the wish nor the time to become teachers, they see themselves as closely collaborating partners of those who do. Several libraries we visited were constructing or renovating facilities with literacy instruction in mind.

Of course, in order to establish successful literacy programming in the library, the library must have the full support of the community, as represented by its board and Friends group, as well as of its staff and patrons. Some libraries in our study had difficulty maintaining a strong commitment to literacy—within the library or within the community—that lasted over time and through changes of key staff. Some libraries had trouble getting the local government and electorate to value library services and provide adequate funding. Others had problems finding and keeping tutors and other volunteers.

Libraries that did enjoy a sustained commitment to literacy usually had strong endorsement from their board of trustees or governing body. Effective programs also tended to have strong support from municipal government, local businesses, and civic organizations. Backing from all of these entities—in the form of tax increases, funding, donations, in-kind contributions, and enthusiasm—can ensure that a library literacy program does not hinge on the efforts of a single energetic librarian.

What can libraries do to establish this base of support in the community? Many of the successful programs in our study encouraged influential local leaders to sit on library boards and literacy councils. In communities we studied, these boards and councils included newspaper editors and television station managers who could help to publicize the literacy programs; city and county commissioners, a judge, and a former mayor who knew the ins and outs of local government; university professors and teachers who had expertise on education issues; bankers and business leaders who recognized that a literate workforce was in their self-interest; civic leaders and community advocates who could locate resources, encourage donations, and forge links with key constituencies; and many others.

2. A Site for Social Change: The Rural Community

If there is one thing that characterizes rural life in the United States today, it is change. Particularly in our study's five states, which have high poverty and unemployment rates, the way of life in rural communities seems to be constantly in a state of revision.

Most rural communities have had to readjust in recent years to changing local and global economies. Among the Viburnum sites, there is Cleveland, Mississippi, which has moved from growing cotton to producing genetically engineered cottonseed, and Belen, New Mexico, once a sleepy farm community, now a residential area for Albuquerque's quickly growing workforce as well as for the many agricultural workers that work in the Rio Grande valley. Guymon, Oklahoma, has grown in population from 7000 to 10,000 practically overnight, due to a new meatpacking plant in the area, while Allen Parish in Louisiana has suddenly sprouted a casino on the small Indian reservation within its boundaries. Whether they are affected by population growth or shrinking resources or both, most rural communities are struggling to keep up with basic services to their residents. Growth is welcomed when it brings jobs or new businesses; however, some rural communities find it hard to manage or even to acknowledge accompanying social ills, like homelessness, drugs, higher crime rates, and illiteracy.

Changing rural economics provide some additional incentives for residents to improve literacy skills. One older resident of the Mississippi Delta told us that when she was growing up her neighbors—especially her male neighbors—didn't see much need for literacy. Their agricultural way of life didn't require them to be literate, and anyway there was no time or money available for reading or writing; they worked when it was light outside, and they didn't spend money on electricity after dark. They left school by the age of fourteen, and that was the end of their educations; literacy may have been a personal goal for them, but the lack of it didn't affect their ability to make a living.

This is no longer the case, even where the economy is still primarily agricultural. Agriculture has become a more complex business; pesticides, medicines, hormones, fertilizers, all require some literacy skills to apply safely and correctly. In industrial areas, the need for basic skills in reading is even more evident. Health and safety regulations require workers to be able to read instructions and warnings on products and equipment. Several people in different communities told us of workplaces that had recently implemented testing for reading skills in response to federal safety regulations and fear of liability for accidents; and sometimes people who had worked in a factory for decades were laid off when it became clear that they didn't know how to read. In general, when local residents can't meet the workplace standards, the jobs go to more qualified people who come in from elsewhere.

Literacy skills are survival skills outside the workplace as well as in it. In areas with major industrial and chemical production, like West Baton Rouge, all residents need to be able to understand and judge the impacts of

environmental threats to their family's health and safety. In areas prone to hurricanes, floods, or other disasters, residents need to keep apprised of the weather and evacuation procedures. As welfare and immigration laws change, people need to be able to measure how these changes affect their lives.

In most rural areas, while the population is widely scattered, the job, services, and resources are not. Recent developments in technology do in some respects reduce the sense of rural isolation. But even if a computer can help you find out where to find a job and how to fill out an application for it, it can't bring the job out to you.

The changes in rural communities go beyond changes in economic opportunities. There are also significant changes in the people who inhabit these communities, and in the social infrastructure that supports them. Americans tend to associate multiculturalism and ethnic diversity with urban areas; however, we found that all the rural areas we looked at were also experiencing changes brought about by the introduction of new linguistic and cultural groups, as well as by changing dynamics among the old groups. In the South and Southwest, the new groups are most commonly Southeast Asian and Mexican or Central American, but almost every part of the globe is represented.

Many educational institutions and social service agencies in rural areas, including those providing literacy, have experienced funding cuts in recent years, and they often cannot adequately serve all sectors of a multiethnic, geographically dispersed population. Too often only one sector is served well, while others are denied, overlooked, or put off. In some areas, social and educational inequities that exist as a lingering reminder of racial segregation have been compounded by bigotry against new immigrant groups, and by social, racial, or ethnic tracking. Other areas may be contending with racial or ethnic intolerance for the first time in their collective memory.

Most schools, libraries, and literacy programs are working to bridge these gaps, and not to widen them. But racism and social inequity exist where you'd least expect to find them. Especially in a small, close-knit community, supposedly public institutions like libraries may "belong" to the population that has been there the longest, and more recent transplants may not feel welcome there. In small towns that have long been divided geographically along racial, ethnic, or class lines, the library too often serves only one "side of the tracks." One state library consultant said that "changing the library often means changing who's there," adding that until a library's staff, trustees, and friends are truly representative of the community they serve, the library will not be truly "public."

Although rural communities and rural libraries face many obstacles, they also have many resources close at hand for problem-solving. For one thing, a small population often leads to a synergistic community, where neighbors are quick to help one another, and partnerships among institutions and business are easily established. Bureaucracies are smaller and less restrictive, and a librarian is apt to know personally most of the people whose funding decisions affect the library.

For another thing, there are many new libraries being built or renovated, and often they are the most pleasant, accessible, and popular architectural space in town. In Thibodaux, Louisiana, the library uses the second floor of a beautiful converted warehouse located at a National Park Service site right on Bayou Lafourche. The NPS museum of Cajun culture and a theater are on the first floor. The library in DeRidder, Louisiana, was destroyed by fire several years ago, but has been rebuilt in the middle of town in an old bank, with a book drop-off where the drive-thru teller was located. When we arrived at 9 am, there was a crowd of regulars waiting for the doors to open. Socorro, New Mexico, is about to add a brand new wing to their classic adobe-style library, with more space for literacy activities as well as desperately needed office space.

When rural communities take bold steps toward redefining themselves in the face of a dwindling economy and diminished expectations, libraries are often in the forefront of their efforts. For example, many rural areas have responded to change by discovering, emphasizing, and capitalizing on their history and culture, in the hope of attracting outside interest while also nurturing community pride and regional identity. Since libraries and literacy centers are archives of genealogy, language, and individual accomplishment, they are often the sites where this cultural recognition takes place. Languages, for example Cajun French, are revived and revalued by younger generations. Local stories and folklore are circulated and preserved. Historic buildings are given new uses (in Cleveland, Mississippi, the literacy program is in an old railway depot in the center of town), old memories are written down or videotaped as oral histories, old photographs are framed and hung.

Finally, the fact that communities are smaller can sometimes mean that their problems are more manageable. For example, it is much easier to think about moving people "from welfare to work," even if there are few jobs available, when those people on welfare can be visualized, or talked about by name. Sometimes problems which in a city would require a major policy restructuring can be solved, in a small town, with a one-time infusion of funds. Motivated community members can turn ideas into programs with immediate results. Anthropologist Carol Stack, in *A Call to Home*, describes how African-Americans are moving back to the South in large numbers from northern cities like New York and Chicago, and how they are using the skills they learned in urban bureaucratic environments to organize and improve their communities in the rural South. "What people are seeking is not so much the home they left behind as a place that they feel they can change, a place in which their lives and strivings will make a difference—a place in which to *create* a home."* Rather than relying on the traditional stereotype of rural life as slow-moving and stuck in the mud, we need to recognize the enormous potential that exists in close-knit, bureaucratically unencumbered environments and, as funders and policymakers, we need to empower rural communities to investigate all available avenues of social change.

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* Stack, Carol (1996) *A Call to Home* New York: Basic Books. P. 199

PEOPLE

"People make the program."
—An adult education coordinator, New Mexico

The success of family literacy depends largely on the efforts of the people involved—not just librarians and literacy staff, but program participants, volunteers, and community members. People contributed to Viburnum family literacy programs in many ways. A literacy instructor in Mississippi, herself a GED graduate, inspired her adult students with daily pep talks. A Louisiana parent broke the ice at a family literacy session by volunteering to read aloud for the group. An older woman in New Mexico shared her oral history about the early days of sheep herding.

People in turn received many benefits from being involved in family literacy, in addition to the obvious ones of enhanced reading and parenting skills. A librarian gained experience in administering a grant program. A volunteer became a more confident tutor. A grandmother realized untapped talents when she made some creative suggestions for an upcoming family literacy event. People also got to know families different from their own and formed working relationships that spilled over into other library activities and community endeavors.

In this section we discuss issues related to librarians, literacy coordinators, volunteers, and program participants—the people who make things happen in family literacy.

1. Program Staff

A. Librarians and Literacy Coordinators

The Beauregard Parish Library, in southwestern Louisiana not too far from the Texas border, is the longest running Viburnum Family Literacy Program, currently in its fifth year. Patricia Holmes is the dynamo behind the library's literacy program, but her official title is that of reference librarian. As she often says, "I wear many hats." She has developed an ongoing family literacy program in association with the Happy Days Head Start program in DeRidder, making presentations to parents, sending storytellers to Head Start, taking books there to put in the children's own "branch" library, and bringing the children to the library. She runs an in-service child-

care education certification training for Head Start parents, in conjunction with the Office of Family Services. She also is very active with both the local and the regional literacy councils, and she assesses the incoming adult learners in the library's adult literacy program. She advises two local church groups on their literacy initiatives, lending materials and putting them in contact with the literacy council.

And, of course, she writes grants. Through Viburnum grants, she has been able to purchase membership for the library in the Louisiana Coalition for Literacy and in the national Laubach Literacy Action, and she and the project partners (sometimes accompanied by a volunteer tutor or two) have been able to travel to literacy conferences and workshops. She also has used Viburnum grant money to make Scholastic's *Parent and Child Magazine* available to every Head Start family, and to keep the library's collection of adult literacy materials for both students and tutors well stocked and current.

The limited funding provided by Viburnum has allowed Patricia Holmes to make connections between agencies so that all can use their resources toward common goals. She has been able to focus on staff development and training while simultaneously building and expanding programs, and improving materials for volunteers.

Like Patricia Holmes, the librarians and literacy coordinators in charge of the family literacy efforts at Viburnum sites have to perform a multitude of duties in addition to planning and implementing the Viburnum grant program. They double as storytellers, tutors, trainers, computer experts, babysitters, caterers, decorators, and handicraft manufacturers, all in the name of family literacy.

Since most libraries are consistently understaffed, the library director may be in charge of the programming, but usually he or she is actively looking for a way to hire someone else to do it. As a library director in New Mexico put it, "We're stretched to the limit as it is." A slightly larger library may be able to put a children's librarian or other librarian in charge of family literacy and outreach. Probably the most desirable situation is when a library has the funds to hire a literacy coordinator, either as a part of the library's staff or under the auspices of the local literacy council. Most of the literacy coordinators that we encountered, if they were not a part of the VISTA/Americorps program, were career educators, either schoolteachers (usually retired) or adult education specialists. Many worked only on a part-time basis; some, like the Vista volunteers and Delta Service Corps members, were paid only a small stipend for their work.

In rural libraries, staff turnover is a significant challenge to maintaining consistent programming. Some libraries had to delay, scale back, or even eliminate programs because a key person moved away or took another job. In other cases, it was the lack of consistent funding that broke staff continuity. When staff has to be downsized as a result of funding cuts, or a grant is not renewed, the literacy coordinator is often the first to have his or her hours reduced, or to lose the job entirely. On the other hand, when funds suddenly become available through a new grant, the literacy coordinator job can be upgraded to full-time, or a dedicated volunteer can be added to the

payroll.

Librarians and literacy coordinators in all types of communities need opportunities to enhance their skills and keep up with developments in their fields, but these needs are especially acute in rural areas. Some rural branch librarians do not have degrees in library science, and many who do have the credentials have not had much background in family literacy or first-hand experience in grant management. Rural librarians and literacy coordinators tend to have fewer opportunities than their urban counterparts to attend staff development workshops or network with other people in their fields. Staff, budget, distance, and time limitations all are factors that make it difficult for rural staff to attend statewide conferences or workshops, let alone national ones.

According to state library officials and the local librarians themselves, rural librarians need more staff training in such areas as administering and evaluating a grant program and instituting model strategies for library-based family literacy. In our travels and interviews, both librarians and literacy coordinators expressed a desire for more training and information about such issues as curricula for learners with special needs, bilingual and ESL materials, strategies for outreach and publicity, community needs assessments, Internet resources, and more. Although there is a great deal of information about family literacy readily available, for example through the American Library Association or through the many national literacy organizations on the World Wide Web, many rural librarians we spoke to were not aware of these resources or did not know how to access them.

B. Volunteers

Both libraries and literacy programs rely heavily on volunteers to complement their staff, for tutoring, GED instruction, storytelling, computer set-up and training, and program administration. Two predominant national literacy volunteer organizations, the Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and Laubach Literacy Action, offer training, certification, and materials for volunteer literacy tutors. Most of the better established literacy programs in our study used one or the other system as the base for volunteer training and materials. In New Mexico, the statewide Coalition for Literacy is affiliated with LVA, so most programs train tutors through LVA, while Laubach was the more commonly used method in the four other states. However, every community tailored training and materials to its own community, and to its particular pool of volunteers.

Usually when a program is just beginning, however, the volunteers train themselves. Often the first volunteers are retired teachers or others with the experience and knowledge necessary to help programs get off the ground. They use children's books from the library and materials from their own collections. Later, as the program grows, they can begin to acquire easy-reading materials specifically targeted toward adult learners, or software for all different levels; and they may also begin to acquire less experienced volunteers who come in with nothing but good intentions and a love for reading and books.

Librarians and literacy coordinators cherish their volunteers, and often could not sustain programs without them. However, the training and administration of volunteers, including the sometimes precarious task of matching tutors with learners, is one more responsibility (and often was a major headache) for already overextended staff. In general, it was easier to attract volunteers than it was to retain them. The amount of training and support for volunteer literacy tutors usually was adequate when they joined the program. However, when volunteers encountered people with learning disabilities or other situations that required special expertise beyond common sense, there often was no one qualified to answer their questions. Volunteers often quit in frustration over their students' lack of progress, or because the students were unreliable about attending tutoring sessions.

Tutoring adults is only one activity of volunteers, however. Volunteers are also very important to children's activities, to parenting sessions, and to whole family programming. In DeRidder, Louisiana, for example, Head Start parents and military personnel from Fort Polk volunteered in the family literacy program. In Bartlett, Texas, senior citizens made teddy bears to be used in the children's programs, and in Johnston County, Oklahoma, teenage volunteers, including an exchange student from India, supervised several aspects of programming. Some of the most dedicated volunteers were those who began as participants in literacy programs, and their experience of being an adult learner made them more sensitive and patient teachers of other adults.

When family literacy is added to adult literacy programs, the lines between teachers and learners tend to blur. Parents who attend programming often take a facilitating role in activities, or help library staff with costumes, decoration, and food. Volunteering becomes less of a structured, individually directed activity, and more of a community effort.

The quality and availability of volunteers of course reflects the demographics of the community. In areas that attract a lot of retirees, like Waveland, Mississippi or Belen, New Mexico, there is a large, diverse, and experienced pool of volunteers available. In other rural areas, where most people work and often face long commutes to their jobs, volunteers with a lot of extra time and patience are few and far between. It is in these areas that institutionalized volunteer programs like VISTA/Americorps can be invaluable to libraries and literacy programs.

We met bright, highly motivated, and energetic Delta Service and Americorps workers in Assumption, Allen, LaFourche, and Beauregard Parishes in Louisiana, and in Socorro, New Mexico. Most of these people were working within their own communities as a way to gain tuition credits for their college educations, and all were very highly valued by their supervisors. For example, in Assumption Parish, Louisiana, one of the library's most dynamic staff members is Caroline Landry, who was initially assigned to the library as a member of the Delta Service Corps (an Americorps program). By the time this report was published, Caroline had been hired full-time as the manager of the Computer-Assisted Learning Center at the Napoleonville Library, and she is using her college credit from the Delta Service Corps program to attend Nicholls State University.

2. Participants

All of the Viburnum family literacy programs tried to serve families with critical literacy needs, including parents without a high school diploma, low-income families, or families for whom English was a second language. Recognizing the strength of the extended family, many welcomed grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives and caregivers. But libraries made different choices about which particular families to target.

Some took a narrow approach, limiting participation in family literacy programs to specific groups. South St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, like many other sites, targeted families of Head Start children. The library in Purcell, Oklahoma, served families who wanted to learn English. The Copiah-Jefferson Regional Library in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, focused on teenage mothers who hadn't finished high school and their children.

Other libraries took a "come one, come all" approach. The library in Napoleonville, Louisiana, opened its family story times to the whole community, while using special strategies to draw in families with the greatest needs. Several librarians thought a heterogeneous approach worked better to attract low-income or undereducated parents because it didn't carry the stigma of a targeted program. But regardless of the approach used, the people didn't always show up.

"The biggest problem isn't funding—it's getting people to admit they have a problem."

"We posted flyers all over town, but no Vietnamese families came."

"People don't have transportation."

As these comments from Viburnum program coordinators attest, a major challenge for libraries—or any literacy provider—is how to recruit participants and keep them coming. Even when attendance was good, librarians often felt they weren't reaching the families with the greatest needs. A few librarians became so discouraged by low participation that they started to feel there was nothing they could do, or they blamed the problem on the people they were trying to reach.

How can libraries spread the word about family literacy to parents who can't read a flyer, or live on the other side of the mountains, or don't want their neighbors to know they have trouble reading? How do you draw in people who feel uncomfortable in a library or don't have a car? How do you keep families coming week after week, when parents are exhausted after a hard day of work, or the kids haven't been fed yet, or there's a school ballgame on the same night? The people we spoke with described the challenges they faced and their ideas for addressing them.

A. Publicizing programs

Viburnum sites used various strategies—both written and oral—to spread the word about their family literacy programs. Many placed flyers, brochures, and posters at busy locations like grocery stores. The library in

Bartlett, Texas, put its publicity materials at the local post office, where nearly everyone in this small town goes to pick up their mail. Libraries also placed notices in local newspapers and church bulletins and encouraged the media to run feature stories about their programs. Coordinators stressed the need to use print materials that were written simply and in the languages spoken by potential participants. They also recommended that publicity materials emphasize the fun and free aspects of the program and the activities for children, to attract parents who might shy away from anything that sounds like adult literacy.

The Bolivar County Literacy Council in the Mississippi Delta had a novel idea for publicizing its literacy programs. Ronnie Wise, director of the county library, persuaded the creators of the Archie comic book series to produce a limited edition in which Archie and his pals visit Mississippi and learn about literacy problems. Some 100,000 copies of this comic book were distributed "from one end of Mississippi to the other—not just in literacy programs, but in doctors' offices and anywhere the public congregates," Ronnie said. "And we've been very happy with the reaction."

No matter how colorful, print materials alone are not enough to reach people who don't read well. Several Viburnum grantees took their case to the airwaves, placing announcements on radio and television. Two librarians in Tucumcari, New Mexico, went on a local radio show to talk about their family literacy program. This library also held a contest for school children to design the best button promoting the program.

Sometimes the best publicity was positive word-of-mouth: moms telling next-door neighbors about the great new program at the library, a school teacher telling parents of children in her Title I reading program about family literacy at the library, a bilingual aide on a Head Start bus reminding Spanish-speaking parents about family night, or a Friends of the Library member touting the library's program at a community picnic. And the more community activities and services a library offered—whether a quilting class in Napoleonville, Louisiana, or fishing poles that could be checked out of the library in Waveland, Mississippi—the more people came in who might benefit from its literacy programs.

B. Outreach to families with the greatest needs

Publicity, no matter how effective, is just the first step. Drawing in people with the greatest literacy needs often requires aggressive recruitment strategies and active coaxing. Many Viburnum grantees worked with schools, Head Starts, and other community groups to find and recruit these families.

"We try a lot of different things to reach different people," said Valerie Moore, director of the Literacy Volunteers of America in Socorro County, New Mexico. This LVA council took its show on the road, offering workshops on family reading and parenting skills anywhere there were people who could benefit: at Head Start centers, the library, a women's shelter, the Alamo Navajo Indian reservation, an alternative high school, maternal and child health clinics, and other locations. The council also

enlisted the help of the fifty organizations that belonged to a local social services coalition. These organizations publicized the council's family literacy programs, recruited participants, and provided meeting sites and transportation to workshops.

Joyce Aguilar, the Socorro LVA family literacy coordinator, believed in starting family literacy early: she even made presentations at birthing classes for parents-to-be. The council distributed free books at the hospital to mothers of newborns. And when a child turned six months or a year old, the family received an invitation to an LVA-sponsored birthday book party. At these parties, parents and their babies read stories and nursery rhymes. They played with puppets and sang songs. Each family received a take-home packet filled with board books, audio tapes, practical information for moms and dads, and useful items like a toothbrush, toothpaste, or baby spoon.

A major obstacle to participation, in the view of librarians, is the stigma some adults feel about admitting their literacy problems. Recognizing this, libraries held adult tutoring components in private rooms where possible, and several sponsored confidential literacy hot lines. Coordinators also emphasized the need for project staff and volunteers to show sensitivity to and respect for participants in all aspects of the program. This might mean avoiding very personal topics in group discussions, refraining from asking delicate questions on registration forms or questionnaires, or taking care not to label people or act in a demeaning or patronizing way. After their first family literacy session, for example, the project team in Johnston County, Oklahoma, stopped using the word "literacy" in the session titles because it seemed to be a turn-off. To build a sense of ownership among participants, some libraries actively involved parents in planning programs or designing activities. Parents also advised on materials, worked out car pools, and recruited other families.

Some of the staff, tutors, or volunteers in the libraries we visited were themselves graduates of literacy programs, and these people who have "been there" often have the most credibility with other potential participants. In Valencia County, New Mexico, former participants in the library's ESL program tutored other adults, and one wrote a Spanish-English phrase book to help the local police avoid the potentially tragic consequences of poor communication with Spanish-speaking citizens. The literacy council in Bolivar County, Mississippi, hired Gail Gates, a graduate of its GED program, to recruit, teach, and motivate others. "I use my GED not to say I'm better," Gail explained, "but to say, follow me." And people did follow; many walk-ins at the Cleveland Depot literacy library were there because they had talked to Gail. Once they made the commitment to learning, Gail did everything she could to ensure they persisted. "If they don't come to class, I keep on them until they do," she said. Gail believed her efforts to draw in students would have a long-term payoff someday: "If she comes in, and she comes in, and someone else comes in, before you know it, this illiteracy thing is going to be nonexistent."

Just because the library sponsors a family literacy program doesn't mean that all activities have to take place at the library. In fact, library-based programs don't always make sense in places that lack an accessible branch

library, or for ethnic and cultural groups without strong ties to the library. So outreach may mean holding family literacy programs in other sites that might be more accessible, familiar, or comfortable for participants than the library. The Purcell Public Library in Oklahoma held its family ESL classes in a local Catholic church attended by most of the Hispanic community. Libraries that sponsored programs in other locations still played a strong role by overseeing administrative functions, providing teachers and staff, designing activities, or providing materials.

C. Reaching diverse linguistic and ethnic groups

In several Viburnum communities, the biggest recruitment challenge was reaching families from diverse language, ethnic, and cultural groups. Some people who don't speak or read English may not see the library as "their" place; as one librarian pointed out, "It's a big building with lots of books they don't understand." Some recent immigrants are not familiar with the concept of a free lending library or with its rather complicated system of organizing things.

Often special strategies are needed to attract diverse participants to family literacy programs. Some Viburnum grantees hired staff or enlisted volunteers and facilitators from the same cultural or language groups as the targeted participants. The library in Purcell, Oklahoma, trained its program staff and volunteers in cultural issues. Grantees also collaborated with ethnic civic organizations, clubs, and churches to plan and publicize family literacy efforts. And several communities, like Valencia County, New Mexico, sought representation of diverse ethnic groups on literacy councils, Friends of the Library organizations, planning committees, or library boards.

Another key strategy was to make sure the materials and content in both the family literacy program and the library's collection reflected the culture and language of the community. Tucumcari attracted new library patrons—and some family literacy participants—by adding popular Spanish-language videos and novels to its collection and by bringing in a renowned bilingual storyteller who skillfully blended Spanish and English so everyone could understand. Several libraries sought advice from program participants before they bought materials and software in other languages.

D. Retention

Once participants have been recruited, the next challenge is to keep them coming. Serving a nutritious snack was a simple but effective drawing card (and a way to keep people's energy from flagging). For some people, the chance to work on a computer was incentive enough. Other programs gave prizes or awards, including books, coupons to local restaurants, posters, and certificates. And perhaps most important, families kept coming when they enjoyed the activities and felt they were getting something meaningful out of them.

Free books were an essential attraction in many programs. "We try to give out books at every workshop we do," said a New Mexico literacy

coordinator. When children could take home their own copies of *The Rainbow Fish*, or parents could refer to their own volume of *101 Ways to Help Your Child Learn to Read and Write*, it reinforced the joys and value of reading in ways that a borrowed book couldn't equal.

Scheduling is another critical part of retention. Of course libraries want to schedule family literacy programs at convenient times, but with today's complicated work and family schedules, this is easier said than done, and hard choices must be made. Assumption Parish Library and several others held events in the evening so that working parents could come, but they had to take care not to overtax tired families. Waveland, Mississippi, and other sites held activities during the day for non-working parents and their children; the staff felt that parents had more energy and children were more attentive than in the evening.

Some librarians took the personal approach. A library literacy coordinator in Mississippi "ministered" to participants, reminding them to come and letting them know they were missed when they didn't show. But this level of attention also places high demands on limited staff.

E. Transportation and child care

Lack of transportation and child care are two primary reasons why people do not stick with literacy programs, and the Viburnum experience bore this out. Family literacy, by its very nature, addresses a large part of the child care need with learning activities for preschool children. Some Viburnum programs also provided supervised care for infants and toddlers so that no parent had to stay home with a child.

Transportation is a more difficult challenge. The tasks of finding transportation to work and day care are demanding enough for some parents, without also finding a ride to a family literacy program. Several Viburnum grantees arranged with other community agencies to use their vans and buses at low cost or no cost. In Decatur, Texas, for example, a community with no public transportation, the Head Start van brought children and parents to the library-sponsored family program at a local church; attendance was high, averaging twenty or more people. But some other libraries said their efforts to coordinate transportation with other agencies were rebuffed because of liability concerns or distance limits. Libraries that did find a van still had to factor in weather, distance, the cost of a driver, illness, no-shows, or mechanical failures. A few places maintained lists of volunteer drivers that people could call for a ride, or helped participants set up car pools and paid the driver a stipend.

PARTNERS

"Collaboration is what keeps literacy programs going."
—A literacy coordinator, New Mexico

Although the Viburnum grants went to public libraries, the Project application required collaboration with other community groups, and libraries teamed up with an array of agencies and organizations. Partnerships spawned by Viburnum grants have expanded the pool of participants, locations, and resources for family literacy. They have created new channels for sharing information and experience.

Consider the benefits that partnership has brought to the Library Literacy Center in the Gulf Coast town of Waveland, Mississippi. This branch library was a bustling place on the day we visited. In the classroom, a retired engineer was teaching GED math. In other rooms, tutors were helping learners with basic reading or ESL, and people were working independently at computers. When the family literacy program was in full swing, an observer would have seen a former school principal dressed as Mother Goose, acting out a story for a group of preschool children. And in another corner, a retired Montessori teacher would have been talking with parents about how children learn through all their senses and how parents can foster this learning.

How did the library get all of this going? Donna Hutchings, Waveland's energetic literacy coordinator, leaves few stones unturned in her efforts to drum up community resources and support. (One volunteer tutor remarked admiringly of Donna, "I've got bluejays at home that aren't as aggressive as she is.") The Gulf Coast's appeal to retirees has been a major boon to the volunteer program. The library also has a strong partnership with local government. A few years ago, the mayor of Waveland—who regularly checks out books from the Center to show that "the mayor reads too"—persuaded the city aldermen to increase the library's share of local tax revenues so it could extend its literacy programs. More recently, the Chamber of Commerce publicized the library literacy programs in a community education flyer sent to every household. After that mailing, said Donna, "our phone rang off the hook; we got fifteen tutors and many students out of that." The library and the youth court carried out a joint program in which youthful offenders completed literacy classes as a part of their sentencing. Cooperative extension agents taught parenting, financial management, nutrition, and gardening to adults in the family literacy program.

The Waveland library's other partners included local school systems,

the department of human resources, and the Hancock County Literacy Council. But Donna was not satisfied. On the day we visited, she was meeting with local housing authorities, and now the library is planning to use its next Viburnum grant to put family literacy outreach centers in public housing complexes.

1. Creating and Sustaining Partnerships

As the Waveland experience shows, successful partnerships do not just happen. Often they begin with the library taking stock of the agencies, organizations, and people in the community and thinking creatively about what each might contribute to a collaborative literacy program. The ALA designed the Viburnum application and training to help librarians through this process.

The most common partners for libraries were those with an education or literacy focus, including literacy councils, Head Start agencies, colleges and universities, and K-12 schools. But the options for partners are as diverse as the main streets of rural America. Viburnum-funded libraries collaborated with small businesses and large corporations, hospitals, courts, churches, Indian tribal councils, community action agencies, senior citizens' clubs, and many others. Even in very small towns or communities with sagging economies, there were still organizations and people with resources to contribute, from the Rotary Club to the public health clinic.

The stronger Viburnum partnerships organized member roles in ways that recognized each partner's strengths and limitations, and coordinated responsibilities so that each partner was doing what it did best. Within partnerships, libraries played different roles, depending on their staffing and facilities, their experience with literacy programs, and the availability of other literacy services. In communities that already had a solid infrastructure for literacy, the library sometimes played a coordinating role: convening the major players, helping them identify and fill service gaps, training tutors, and distributing materials to literacy providers. In communities with few existing services, the library often initiated a literacy effort. "Nobody else was doing it, so we had to do something," said a Louisiana librarian.

2. Importance of Literacy Councils

Literacy councils and volunteer literacy providers were especially critical partners in Viburnum family literacy programs. Although the term "literacy council" meant different things in different places, it generally referred to a nonprofit organization that either coordinated or provided literacy services, often through volunteer tutors. Several libraries with Viburnum programs were working hand in glove with an active literacy council or similar organization, often in ways that expanded the capabilities of both. "Libraries depend on literacy councils to do the things they do so

well," a Louisiana librarian explained. For example, a literacy council might use the library for materials, one-to-one tutoring, and children's programming, while the library might rely on the council to conduct presentations, train volunteers, or help with computer training.

Some libraries delegated administrative responsibility for their Viburnum programs to a literacy council. Often these councils had started out as projects of the library, then became independent entities, a status that was advantageous to both the library and the council. A separate council might be better positioned than the library to raise money specifically for literacy, build and sustain community support for literacy, and make decisions that a library board did not have the expertise or inclination to make. Councils also served as vehicles to coordinate programs among multiple literacy providers. They could bring stability and consistency to literacy services that transcended changes in funding, staffing, or legislative policies.

The Bolivar County Literacy Council in Cleveland, Mississippi, was started by the library in 1986. Four years later it became a separate organization with its own staff and budget and a board that included a cross-section of movers in the community. Using a mix of public and private funds, the council offers adult education, job training, and family literacy to some 400 students at a dozen sites around the county. As testimony to the council's credibility, the local community college decided a few years ago to channel its state adult education grant to the council, rather than create its own set of programs.

In a few sites, literacy councils failed to take root or were not very active. The reasons varied: lack of local interest, inadequate funding, staff so overextended they could not attend meetings, overlap with other committees, and turf issues. A council is not an end in itself but a means to improve literacy services and coordination. Some libraries found other ways to accomplish these ends.

3. Head Start: A Natural Partner

Local Head Start programs are especially rewarding partners for Viburnum family literacy programs. The federally funded Head Start program provides early childhood education to children from low-income families, often the same families that literacy programs seek to reach. Head Starts are well-established in most communities, and many have their own facilities and transportation. The Head Start model already emphasizes family involvement and parent education—"we're one huge family," said a Mississippi Head Start director—and in fact, several Head Starts are already doing family literacy. So the foundations for family literacy partnerships are already there. The Center for the Book at the Library of Congress recently completed a national partnership program funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to demonstrate how libraries can work with Head Start agencies to enhance learning and improve parent involvement in children's literacy. The project conducted regional training workshops and

produced a video and written materials with ideas for building partnerships and examples of possible activities.

When we visited Belen, New Mexico, the Adelino Head Start was preparing for a second round of family literacy sessions, this time to be held at its new Parent Resource Center. The Center is the latest addition to a complex that includes a remodeled school built by the WPA in 1928 and an assortment of quonset huts and trailers to house the ever-growing Head Start enrollment. With Viburnum funding, the Adelino Head Start and the Valencia County Literacy Council first offered family literacy in the fall of 1996. Parents learned English and basic literacy, sharpened their computer skills, and took other practical classes, while their children did learning activities in a Head Start classroom. The Parent Resource Center will provide a larger and better equipped space for family literacy and regular Head Start parent training. In addition, parents can take computer classes and check out books and activities from the parent lending library. The staff has assembled take-home family literacy activity kits (packaged in buckets donated by a local creamery) in both Spanish and English; the kits include books and learning games geared to a special theme, like animals, geometric shapes, or music.

The Adelino Head Start is just one of several partners working with the Valencia County Literacy Council, a coordinating body started in 1988 by three concerned women: the library director, a reporter from the *Albuquerque Journal*, and the coordinator of adult education at the local campus of the University of New Mexico. Since 1988, the VCLC has grown and now has its own offices (in the library) and its own staff, headed by Boleslo Lovato, a retired schoolteacher and former mayor of Belen. The VCLC started its family literacy program at one elementary school, but has expanded into two more schools and the Head Start center. The VCLC also offers ESL, computer, and basic literacy instruction at the library and works closely with the adult basic education program at the university. Collaboration has enabled the VCLC to bring together scattered resources to form creative, cost-effective programs. When asked which partner was the "lead" agency, Pam Perez, the adult education coordinator, replied, "We all play equal roles."

PROGRAMS

"If one way doesn't work we find another."
—A literacy coordinator, New Mexico

Energetic staff and volunteers, dedicated participants, and committed partners can be effective only if they have substantive programs with which to work. The key to a successful Viburnum grant project was a creative and workable program design that could take advantage of existing resources as well as new ideas and changing circumstances, and that had positive impacts on both participants and libraries.

1. Planning

In the stronger programs we reviewed, the key people had carefully considered community needs, set the goals they wanted to achieve, then planned a program around those needs and goals. Good plans included a degree of risk-taking—a willingness to try something the library hadn't done before—balanced with realistic expectations about what one program could reasonably accomplish.

But as grantwriters and grantmakers both know, sometimes things change drastically during the grant cycle, and even good plans go awry. When we got out into the field, we realized that several libraries were offering a different kind of family literacy program than the one described in their Viburnum application. Some libraries had scaled back on the ambitiousness of their plans. "We had big plans, but now we realize it takes a long time to get established," a Texas librarian explained. Others delayed the starting date of the program. A few sites were unable to mount any program and gave back the grant money.

Why did plans change? Personnel issues were a big factor. When key people resigned, moved, or took time off to recuperate from an illness or an accident (as happened in two sites), sometimes no one was available right away to pick up their duties. Their replacements may have had different ideas about programming. Fiscal and logistical problems were another reason for change: a funding source dried up, an expected partner backed out, a source of transportation fell through, or the targeted participants did not show up. These kinds of setbacks inevitably arise during implementation of a literacy program, and overcoming them requires administrators who know how to roll with the punches.

Sometimes the reason for a delay or change lay with ALA/Viburnum's own administration of the program, particularly during 1996-97, as ALA involvement was winding down. Some libraries did not receive timely notification of their grant awards or prompt answers to their questions, and they were not sure how to proceed.

A change in plans did not always mean a diminishment, however. Some libraries seized on unexpected opportunities—such as a grant from another source or a partner with unique assets—to do more than planned. Several libraries shifted the emphasis or strengthened the content of their programs as they learned more about family literacy, community needs, or available resources. Often the most promising programs were those in which the project staff took a critical look at what they were doing and used this knowledge to do things better, even while the project was in process.

With its first Viburnum grant in 1995, the Purcell Public Library in Oklahoma had ambitious plans to start a family literacy program for low-income parents and children. The staff worked hard to design a good library-based program that included family reading time, models of reading aloud, and discussions of parenting skills. But participation at this program was sporadic. Especially worrisome was the fact that no Hispanic families came, even though the area had a fast-growing Hispanic population with a need for ESL. After some soul-searching, the library had to admit that its plan, though good on paper, really wasn't addressing the needs of its community.

So with its second Viburnum grant, the library rethought its strategy and decided to focus on outreach and participation. The library literacy coordinator contacted a Catholic church that had many Hispanic parishioners and free meeting space. The library set up ESL classes at the church twice a week, encouraging parents to bring their children. The library also asked for help with recruitment from a large manufacturer that employed many Hispanic workers, and this brought in several more families. The program was well attended until the Immigration and Naturalization Service raided a local workplace, sending some workers away or underground and making even legal residents wary. Participation at the classes dropped sharply. But after a while, people started coming back, and attendance averaged fifteen to twenty people per session. "Each week someone brings a new family member," said Ronda Lehew, the literacy services coordinator, and while this sometimes complicated instruction, "the family feeling is impressive." With its third Viburnum grant, the library is redesigning its ESL curriculum to emphasize practical life skills, such as going to the doctor or using the post office, and, if feasible, to add citizenship classes.

2. Budgeting and Spending

One of the more surprising results of our evaluation was the consensus among grantees that even $3,000 can make a big difference for rural libraries. As a New Mexico literacy coordinator remarked, "In Washington, D.C., that's coffee money, but it really helps here." Libraries accomplished remarkable things with the modest Viburnum grants and often used them as

yeast to raise cash or in-kind contributions from other sources. Many sites combined Viburnum funds with state and federal grants for adult education, K-12 education, job training, arts and humanities, or welfare reform. City and county appropriations and local United Ways also provided matching funds.

Libraries spent Viburnum funds on a variety of goods and services. The following kinds of expenditures were the most popular.

Books and materials. Libraries bought children's books, family books, parenting materials, adult easy-reader books, and instructional materials for basic literacy, ESL, and GED preparation. They also bought educational games, craft materials, and notebooks.

Technology. Libraries purchased computer hardware and software, VCRs and video tapes, audio cassette players and audio tapes, and CDs.

Salaries, stipends, and staff development. Viburnum grants often covered a portion of the salaries for literacy coordinators, library staff, or administrative staff; or supported stipends to VISTA volunteers, teachers, facilitators, storytellers, and interpreters. Some libraries used funds for staff development, including fees and transportation to family literacy workshops and conferences, fees to bring in a training consultant, staff subscriptions to literacy journals, and memberships in relevant professional associations.

Outreach and publicity. Libraries used funds to advertise programs, produce brochures and flyers, hold open houses, buy door prizes and refreshments, and pay for transportation and infant care.

3. Program Design

Libraries do not have to start from scratch in designing family literacy programs. Information about effective models, methods, and curricula is available from research centers, foundations, federal and state governments, the ALA, and many other sources. Starting with proven practices doesn't mean that a library has to adopt someone else's model wholesale. Viburnum sites chose elements from different models to design programs tailored to their needs.

Several Louisiana libraries used Viburnum funds to supplement, customize, or extend the "Prime Time" family reading model developed and funded by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. This eight-week program, which has been successfully implemented in libraries across Louisiana, is similar in its broad goals to the Viburnum Project but uses a more structured approach, as well as many more dollars per program. In Prime Time, a professional storyteller reads a children's book from a selected list, then a humanities scholar leads parents and children in a discussion about the meaning of the story and the values it teaches. After completing all of the sessions, the libraries return the Prime Time books, which are lent to another site. With Viburnum funds, the Allen Parish library bought one Prime Time book for each participating family, as well as learning games to entertain young children while their parents and siblings attended Prime Time. Beauregard Parish Library used local funds to buy books on the Prime

Time list for its collection and planned to develop its own version of Prime Time using local storytellers and discussion leaders. Assumption Parish made activity packets based on Prime Time stories for families to check out.

A key part of program design is thinking about how the components of the program fit together; for example, aligning parent activities with children's activities, or suggesting home activities that reinforce what families are doing at the library. The ALA/Viburnum application tried to encourage a coherent design by asking grantees to consider all the different components of family literacy when describing their proposed program. Even grantees that did not offer all components still benefited from setting goals with the whole family in mind.

4. Content and Activities

For several Viburnum grantees, family literacy was a relatively new concept. "Real, true family literacy is hard to do," said one Mississippi literacy coordinator, noting that "moderate versions are more feasible." Many libraries did not provide all the components of a complete family literacy program, focusing instead on pieces that made the most sense for libraries.

The most common activities provided by Viburnum family literacy programs were family story times, parent education, adult literacy education, take-home reading and learning activities, computer-based learning activities, and English as a Second Language.

Family story times and reading sessions. This was by far the most popular activity, possibly because libraries considered it a natural extension of their existing children's programming. Well over half the grantees offered some type of family reading activity, usually at the library. In addition to storytelling, these sessions often included discussions about the books read, modeling and practice in reading aloud to children, writing and number activities, oral history, and craft projects. A key part was an orientation to the library, with encouragement for families to sign up for cards and use the library regularly.

Parent education. Allen Parish, Louisiana, and several other sites provided workshops and information to help parents become stronger partners in their children's learning. These sessions addressed such issues as child development, school readiness, reading to children, motivation for children to succeed in school, and parent self-esteem. Some programs also dealt with practical skills, such as home safety, nutrition, career development, and services in the community. Often children came along and engaged in learning games, arts and crafts, or story times in an adjacent room.

Adult literacy education with a children's component. Libraries provided literacy tutoring, adult basic education classes, GED preparation, or employability training for adults, while children did other activities in another room. Sometimes parents and children came together for joint activities.

Take-home reading and learning activities. Several programs provided kits or activity sheets that parents and children could do together at home. Libraries also tried to motivate families to read at home by distributing free books and reading lists or asking families to fill out reading logs or journals. Some sites gave prizes to families who read a certain number of books.

Computer-based learning activities. Families worked together on educational software or learned basic computer literacy skills. Some libraries used computers to provide adult literacy instruction, ESL, or GED preparation. Others had children working on computers while their parents took classes.

English as a Second Language. Several Viburnum programs taught English as a Second Language or bilingual literacy to families who spoke other languages at home.

Librarians shared their thoughts with us about the kinds of activities and content that worked best for family literacy. "Keep it light," advised a teacher in New Mexico. And Viburnum sites came up with a host of creative ideas that were lively, fun, and interactive. (*See Box, Bright Ideas for Family Literacy Activities.*) Arts and crafts, cooking, writing, costumes and play acting, puppet theaters, rhymes and songs—all are ways to make family literacy sessions appealing.

Good family literacy programs also used high-quality children's literature with inviting themes, from time-tested favorites like *Pinocchio* and *Where the Wild Things Are*, to newer additions to the canon like *Amazing Grace*. The people leading the sessions "knew their stuff." Parents appreciated content that was relevant and practical, from understanding why your child writes her name backwards to administering CPR.

Bright Ideas for Family Literacy Activities

- Make early childhood education activity boxes that families can check out to build their children's skills. Fill shoeboxes, buckets, or bags with books and learning games related to a special theme like colors, shapes, music, dinosaurs, or science. (Belen, NM, Assumption Parish, LA)

- Place "community bookshelves" in heavily-trafficked sites around town like grocery stores; these are mini-libraries where families can borrow and return books on the honor system or share books they've already read with others. (Allen Parish, LA)

- Provide families with audio tapes to accompany stories read in family literacy sessions. Children and parents can listen to the tapes as they follow along in the book; it gives children help with reading and parents a model for how to read aloud. (Socorro, NM)

- Sponsor birthday book parties for parents and infants at their six-month and first birthdays. Read stories, use puppets, sing songs, recite rhymes, and give each family a packet to take home. Packets might include board books, audio tapes, toothbrush and toothpaste, a baby spoon, and information for parents about child development and community services. (Socorro, NM)

- Have parents and children fill out reading journals about books read at home, telling what they liked about the book and what they talked about as they read. (Beauregard Parish, LA; Tishomingo, OK)

- Deliver baby books and child development information to parents of newborn children at the hospital. (Socorro, NM)

- Ask families to "pull the plug on TV" for a certain time each week; ask parents to keep a journal of positive activities the families did instead of watching television. (Bolivar County, MS)

- Hold a treasure hunt in the library with a series of clues that children and parents must read and follow to reach the prize. (Tishomingo, OK)

- Invite families to make books based on their own oral histories; give them disposable cameras to take pictures to illustrate their books. (El Rito, NM)

- Give out free children's books to low-income families anywhere and everywhere: at libraries, community centers, health clinics and hospitals, social service agencies, homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, birthing classes, doctors' and dentists' offices, and more. (Socorro, NM)

- Ask children to interview their grandparents and write up the stories they tell. (Long Beach, MS)

- Ask children to write and illustrate their own books. (Waveland, MS)

- Bring together speakers of English with speakers of another language for a bilingual family literacy night, where participants learn about the other language through conversation and hands-on activities. (Tucumcari, NM)

5. Impacts

The positive impacts of Viburnum family literacy programs were readily apparent as we traveled through the South and Southwest. In DeRidder, Louisiana, we were greeted warmly by Head Start children and teachers, who told us about the library-sponsored story times and proudly showed us their "community library"—a cardboard booth full of children's books provided by the Beauregard Public Library. That afternoon, we met with a roomful of mothers, tutors, Rotary Club members, and other community people, all eager to tell us what the programs of the library and literacy council meant to them. A mother described how the library's family story time helped change her son from a reluctant reader to a star in the school reading program; now he was reading "tons of books," including classics like *Black Beauty*. An adult literacy tutor told us about an elderly man who wanted to learn to read but was intimidated by books; she started him on computerized instruction, and in time he could not only read, he also made public service announcements for the literacy council.

In Socorro, New Mexico, we saw parents and preschool children reading *Franklin Is Lost*, a story about a turtle, then making turtle-shaped maracas from paper plates and pinto beans. A librarian in another New Mexico town, herself a tutor, became tearful when she told us about a grandfather who sought tutoring after he was embarrassed about not being able to help his granddaughter learn her lines for a school play. "I don't want to go to my grave not reading," the man said. In time, he had learned enough to read the Bible. At the West Baton Rouge Parish Library in Louisiana, a mother said she appreciated how people respected her opinions when she spoke up during discussions at the library family literacy program. Another parent said the library story time was the one time each week when she knew the family would be doing something together.

Our visits also gave us a more intimate view of the problems and challenges librarians and literacy coordinators faced in mounting family literacy programs. What was encouraging was that when programs did not produce the impacts hoped for, most librarians had a pretty good idea why and wanted to do better the next time. So even the less successful programs still had some beneficial outcomes.

While first-hand experiences are the best way to grasp the impact of family literacy, this was not always feasible. So we talked on the telephone with program coordinators in libraries we couldn't visit, and they, too, had some heartfelt stories to tell. We reviewed written evaluations and evidence from many sites, and we read parent comments and letters. Here we summarize what we learned from all of these sources.

A. Effects on participants

Viburnum family literacy programs helped to spur families' interest

in reading and increase the amount of time they spent reading. Many families began to build home libraries around the books distributed at family literacy sessions. "The smiles and beams of pride the children show when you tell them these books are theirs cannot be expressed in mere words," said an assistant literacy director in Texas. Often it was the children who urged their tired parents to attend family literacy sessions. In West Baton Rouge Parish, children willingly came to the library on Halloween, some foregoing trick-or-treating because they didn't want to miss family reading time.

In Waveland, Mississippi, a program facilitator reported that by mid-year, preschool children began "writing" and illustrating their own books—"the greatest amount of concentration we've seen with these little ones since we've started this project." A father in Johnston County, Oklahoma, said that since participating in the family literacy program, "I make a more conscious effort to read to my son."

Many parents in rural areas told us that family literacy programs had helped them become more effective partners in their children's education. A mother in Beauregard Parish, Louisiana, said: "When we see our children learning, it encourages us to learn more ourselves." In South St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, 74 out of 92 parents responding to a questionnaire said that they definitely felt more confident about helping their child to learn in school as a result of the family literacy program, and 13 others reported that they sometimes felt more confident. Parents across the five states spoke of side benefits of family literacy, such as families spending more time together and fathers becoming more involved in their children's education. The coordinator in Purcell, Oklahoma, described the affection she saw among family members in the ESL program: "Some teenagers come just so their parents will come."

The adults in family literacy programs testified to their own accomplishments. A woman in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, told us that she had gotten a job during the past year because of the literacy skills and confidence she had gained from the library literacy program. A woman in Oberlin, Louisiana, wrote, "I thank you for giving me a chance to go back to school and learn more." Several library-based family literacy programs reported the success of their adult education components. For example, about 75 percent of the parents participating in the family literacy program in Decatur, Texas, which included adult literacy instruction, went on to get their GED.

A young mother from Cleveland, Mississippi, wrote a letter about her experience in the library literacy program.

> I'm 25 years old. I'm a single black parent with 3 kids. . . I want to get my G.E.D. so that I can go to college so I can become a Teacher or a Teacher Assistant to help children. I love working with kids, especially my 3 kids. I love to take up time with my kids and help them with their work and problems they may be having. I love going to the Family Reading class because it helps me read to my kids more and it helps me with my reading.

B. Effects on libraries and communities

Viburnum grants also had positive effects on libraries and communities. First, the grants encouraged several rural libraries to start family literacy programs where none had existed before. "We could not have even begun without the Viburnum grant," wrote a librarian in Louisiana. A librarian in Texas said that the grant enabled the library to establish a connection with Head Start. "These were the first stars sprinkled," she said, noting that despite some rocky patches with staff changes, the program has momentum.

Second, administering a Viburnum program helped libraries to better understand the concept of family literacy and learn more about what works and what doesn't. Most applied this knowledge to improve services and increase participation. Some grantees continued activities begun with Viburnum funding after the grant ended. Libraries also learned from the other Viburnum sites. The literacy coordinator in Valencia County, New Mexico, told us that they modeled their family literacy program after a Viburnum project in Louisiana.

Third, several libraries reported an increase in library use after sponsoring a family literacy program. In South St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, library circulation and patronage went up considerably after the program for Head Start families began. The Johnston County Library, Oklahoma, circulated 428 items among its 119 family literacy participants during the project year. Beauregard Parish reported an average monthly circulation of 383 books for its community book center at the Head Start. In addition, a high percentage of Head Start households in Beauregard got library cards after participating in the family reading program.

Fourth, many librarians and literacy coordinators said they became more capable administrators and more aggressive grant seekers after managing a Viburnum grant. A successful grant built their confidence to apply for others and gave the library more credibility with other funders. "I had been sort of afraid of applying for grants," said a librarian in Oklahoma. "I didn't think I could handle it, but I had been hearing about Viburnum for a while, and I finally decided to go for it."

Finally, Viburnum programs enhanced the visibility of the library in the community and made the public more aware of the library's services and resources. "We get the biggest kick out of being spoken to and waved to all over town," said a Louisiana librarian. People drawn to the library for family literacy come back for other reasons, and many remain active patrons.

GRANTMAKING ISSUES

"When you have nothing to work with, $3000 seems like a million dollars."
—A librarian in Mississippi

One of the goals of this evaluation was to critically examine the Viburnum grantmaking process and investigate how the grant program might be revised or improved. Every foundation has its own goals and limitations; however, we think the challenges faced by Viburnum in trying to implement a multifaceted and geographically scattered grant program may be shared by many other funders.

1. Should we give nationally or locally?

At Viburnum we make some national-level grants ($75,000-150,000) and some smaller local ones ($1,000-25,000). The Family Literacy Project has a national component, through a training and administration grant that went for the first four years to the American Library Association and will be going for the next three years to the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. This national component promotes the grant program, administers the application process, and offers training to applicants. Ideally it also provides a network of resources and ideas for grantees, and publicizes their programs beyond their constituencies. The local component, in the form of the $3000 grants to individual libraries, allows for community design and control of programming, and an opportunity to explore new partnerships on the local level.

Since Viburnum has only one part-time staff member and no office, in order to work with many local grantseekers we needed to channel our grants through a larger organization. The infrastructure of a national organization like the American Library Association or the Center for the Book can be tremendously useful to a small foundation that wants to offer a national program. But adding more people and bureaucracy to the grant process can pose more problems if staff turnovers or other unexpected events occur. Grantmakers need to weigh the costs and hassles of dealing with a faraway bureaucracy against the advantages of having trained professionals with office support running the program.

2. What is the right size grant?

The $3000 grants seemed very small to Viburnum when we began the program, but experience shows us that librarians and literacy coordinators can do a great deal with very little. In fact, many librarians told us that they liked the small size of the grant, because it allowed them to try out something for the first time and see if it worked. Often librarians will hesitate before applying for bigger grants, because they're not sure that they can manage them, or don't feel that a rural library has a chance to win them.

Viburnum grants are also relatively unstructured. The idea is that librarians will design their programs in accordance with their community's needs and capacities, not with Viburnum's guidelines. Of course, a lack of structure can be frightening or even threatening to certain kinds of people—it doesn't work for everyone. We have had an occasional grant kept in the bank for a year because the librarian couldn't decide how best to use it, even though an application with a detailed program plan and budget had been completed. In most cases, however, our unexpended grants have resulted from staffing changes that have prevented the implementation of the project.

One way that the $3000 grant can be made more significant is by offering it in conjunction with training. The librarians in our study mentioned several different kinds of training that would be helpful.

- setting up a literacy council
- conducting a survey or needs assessment
- involving local businesses
- fund-raising
- working with Friends groups
- structuring a program
- planning program outreach and retention
- finding other program models and resources (such as computer software, high-low materials, bilingual materials)
- networking with other family literacy providers.

3. Who deserves it most?

The other difficult choice faced by foundations in a variety of different contexts is whether to give to those organizations or communities that have the greatest or most pressing needs, or to those that have the motivation, capacity, and structure to accomplish more with the grant money, even if they have a lesser need. In the context of our family literacy grants, for example, some of the communities with the most needy people are also lacking in the community infrastructure and partnerships to carry out successful programming. They will manage to buy materials for the libraries, but fail in reaching out to their target population. Are these grants wasted? Absolutely not. First, the small size of our grants makes them appropriate for small steps, such as acquiring a base collection of literacy materials, some videos, or computer software. Second, once a library has

become a part of the grant program, the librarians will become involved in networking and training and, we hope, can acquire the skills and inspiration needed to build literacy programming.

From our point of view, even if a grant goes only toward materials and none of the programming is successful, it is not a total loss. The heart of a library is its collection of books, which will be there in two years and in ten. The materials will be available if the staff should eventually be able to put together a more successful literacy program, and in the meantime they will be accessible to anyone in the community who is independently motivated to seek them out.

4. What expectations should a foundation have?

We have concluded from our research that a multi-site grant program like the Viburnum Family Literacy Project benefits from mixing fully integrated, well-structured and fully staffed sites with sites that are just getting off the ground and making a lot of mistakes. The good programs can serve as models for the struggling ones. For the community lacking in infrastructure and interagency cooperation, a grant can serve as an incentive to make partnerships work.

In order to tolerate this mix of unsuccessful programs with successful, a foundation may need to reconsider how it measures program outcomes. In matching libraries with literacy, we are matching an already existing publicly funded institution with a societal need. It is not fair to expect libraries that have played a traditionally low-key role in their community to change their spots overnight, and become the most proactive social agency in town. Often the Viburnum grant lets that type of library put its toe in the water, and try out programming that goes beyond Summer Reading for kids. Our goal as a foundation is not to see instant results, but to make sure that when that library comes back for a second grant cycle it gets a lot of support and ideas and models to help it go further out into the water.

5. How does the state fit in?

There are roles that foundations and state agencies need to play to make this kind of community-based program truly viable. Both the foundation and the state library, as well as state literacy coalitions or resource centers, need to ensure that technical assistance is available for every aspect of literacy programming. The state can be invaluable to foundations in publicizing grant information, acting as liaison between foundations and local communities, offering and/or coordinating regional training workshops and information sessions, developing regionally appropriate curricula (like bilingual Spanish/English programming for New Mexico, or Cajun programming for Louisiana), and, of course, promoting literacy whenever possible. Foundations can help by setting up grant programs that include a

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role for the state. Viburnum is working toward this by using the state Centers for the Book, which are independent state agencies usually located at or near the state libraries (and which currently exist in 34 of the 50 states).

6. How do other literacy providers fit in?

Because of Viburnum's overall focus on libraries, this report concerns mainly library-based family literacy. However, we don't want to give the impression that other kinds of literacy programs are less effective, or less deserving of funding. On the contrary, independent volunteer-based literacy programs often have been *more* successful than libraries in promoting literacy in rural areas, because they tend to have a more clearly defined mission and method. Like rural libraries, these organizations usually are run on a shoestring, dependent upon one or a handful of dynamic and committed individuals, and constantly on the lookout for financial support.

Foundation money is sorely needed by all of the organizations that work with literacy in rural areas, regardless of whether they focus on adults, or children, or both. By providing incentives for agencies and providers to form partnerships, foundations may help communities work together more efficiently. By designing grant programs that are flexible and open-ended, they can nurture positive change and creativity.

CRITICAL AREAS OF CHANGE

"The community is looking toward the future, and that is good."
—A librarian in Louisiana

Our conversations with librarians and literacy coordinators often moved beyond the specifics of the Viburnum Project and turned to issues in the wider world. The issues that came up most often were technology, funding, state and federal policies for libraries and literacy, and welfare reform—all good examples of how decisions made outside the library can shape what goes on inside the library.

1. Technology

Even in very rural areas, technology has changed the nature of libraries and literacy programs. Technologies for family literacy can be low-tech or high-tech, commonplace or sophisticated. The library in Tucumcari, New Mexico, bought cassette players to enable families to listen to books on tape, while the Socorro County LVA uses computers with synthesized speech and voice recognition for family literacy. In Mississippi, the Copiah-Jefferson Regional Library bought videos on parenting and self-esteem, while the Bolivar County Literacy Council cosponsored a satellite town meeting on family literacy. And like many other Viburnum sites, the Lafourche Parish Library in Louisiana bought computers and software for children and adults.

Most rural libraries in the five states had at least one computer for their patrons to use (although not always the most advanced model). Most also had Internet access, or were about to get it. All 65 library systems in Louisiana have computers with Internet access, at least in their headquarters library, and most branches will be on line in the near future. In New Mexico, the state has equipped 70 of its 73 public libraries with work stations for Internet access. A multimillion dollar state initiative in Texas is slated to connect the vast majority of the state's 500 libraries by the end of this year and train librarians to use this new capacity. Similar technology initiatives are underway in Mississippi and Oklahoma. Most libraries in our study had also computerized their card catalogues or were in the process of doing so.

The library in Bloomfield, New Mexico, which is located in between the Navajo and the Jicarilla Apache reservations, used its Viburnum grant for a small-scale but promising program to promote family computer literacy in

a town with many latchkey children and few after-school opportunities. Using the library's three computers, the library staff taught adolescents how to use educational software and navigate the Internet. These youthful "computer tutors" were then required to bring their parents, siblings, and other relatives to the library to teach them what they had just learned. The experience was "amazing," said Esther Trost, the former library administrator. "People used the computers who otherwise wouldn't have," she said, and interest was very high, but the library needed more hardware to expand this effort.

With its Viburnum grant, the Assumption Parish Library in Napoleonville, Louisiana, is developing a Computer-Assisted Learning Center at the library. The Center includes four networked computers that adults and children can use to access a variety of sophisticated programs in several languages, including training software for more than 150 occupations. A shortage of tutors in this small community was one reason why the library went the technology route. The librarians also felt this approach removed some of the stigma of literacy instruction. The library's software can diagnose the learner's reading level and problem areas, then individualize instruction; it can even help librarians figure out when a live tutor is needed.

Some libraries were considering how technology could expand services to people in remote areas. Branigan Memorial Library in Las Cruces, New Mexico (which we visited to discuss a possible future Viburnum grant) was working with twenty other community agencies to design bookmobiles outfitted with computer work stations and connected to a single network. These "infomobiles" would link people in distant parts of the county with numerous public services, including adult education, health clinics, universities, arts programming, and of course the library.

The growth of technologies in rural libraries reflects the increasing emphasis being placed on technology in state, federal, and foundation grant programs. One example is the new $200 million private grant program for libraries to acquire technology announced by Microsoft founder Bill Gates. Another is the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), the main source of federal aid to libraries. LSTA was enacted in 1996 and is now being implemented by state libraries. LSTA has a much sharper focus on technology than its predecessor law, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). The new law shifts federal funds toward such purposes as improving technology in libraries and linking libraries with other information sources, and away from such general purposes as library services, maintenance, and construction. How these changes will affect literacy programs remains to be seen.

With the rise of technology, rural libraries, like libraries everywhere, are facing "bytes or books" questions about technology's place in their broader mission and the effectiveness of technology in literacy education. On one hand, the librarians we interviewed believed that computers were a real draw for adult learners. Computers can make literacy services available during convenient times, serve more people than one-to-one tutoring, and permit learners to work independently, especially in sites or subjects where

tutors are scarce. And as adult learners work on literacy skills, they also pick up the basic computer skills so necessary in today's workplace.

On the other hand, some librarians feared that technology was contributing to declining interest in books and shorter attention spans. Literacy coordinators also noted that computer-based instruction was not appropriate for certain learners with low literacy skills, which is why their tutoring programs were filled with people who had dropped out of computer-based adult education. Many adults find computer use frustrating or challenging. Consequently, some Viburnum sites that used computers tried to have a live tutor sit with learners while they worked on the computer. Libraries also screened software to make sure it was appropriate for low-level readers.

The cost of some technologies was another issue raised. Hardware sophisticated enough to handle new language and literacy software can be expensive. Then there are fees for wiring, installation, maintenance, service, and staff training. One Mississippi librarian said the library couldn't connect all of its new computers to the Internet because it couldn't afford the line charges and connectivity fees. A New Mexico library revised its plans for a school-based computer literacy program because the school connectivity fees shot up so high. (The good news was that the affected students wrote their state legislators, and the state eventually agreed to provide some funding.) Many Viburnum sites were anxiously waiting for the Federal Communications Commission to implement its new program of discounted telecommunications fees for libraries and schools in low-income areas.

2. Funding

"Funding is always temporary, remember that," a Mississippi librarian cautioned. Tight budgets are a fact of life in the library and literacy worlds. Many libraries in our study were struggling to pay salaries and keep their doors open during normal hours, let alone provide the "frills" of a library literacy program. Even well-established literacy programs operated close to the margins, and their coordinators were always worried about the next year's funding.

To deal with this situation, some librarians and literacy coordinators have become aggressive grant seekers. Others have taken their case to the city council or the electorate. Many have become adept at raising support from businesses and civic groups. And almost every coordinator we met knew how to ferret out resources wherever they could—from buying bargain-basement books to convincing local merchants to donate computers, furniture, or refreshments. "We're scroungers," a New Mexico literacy coordinator explained.

A. State and local funding

The total funding available to public libraries varied considerably from site to site, depending on several factors. One determinant is the level

of state investment in public libraries. According to the U.S. Department of Education, state aid to the public libraries in our five-state region varied from about 15 cents per capita in Louisiana to about $1.44 per capita in Mississippi, with the other three states in between. Another relevant factor is how the state allocates funds among large and small libraries and among urban and rural areas. Some rural librarians felt they were not getting their fair share, and were especially disadvantaged in competing for state and federal competitive grants.

But the local funding base is by far the most important factor in the financial stability of public libraries. In the five targeted states, the vast majority of funding for public libraries came from local sources—from a minimum of about 76 percent in Mississippi to a high of 94 percent in Texas. This meant that the fiscal health of public libraries was closely tied to the local economy, tax base, and political situation. Whether libraries floundered or flourished often depended on the willingness of local political leaders and citizens to support a tax increase to improve library services or approve a bond issue to build a new library.

High noon came to the Lafourche Parish Library in Thibodaux, Louisiana, on July 19, 1997, the date local voters were scheduled to decide whether to raise the tax rate an extra seven mills for the next ten years to provide desperately needed funding for the library. Decades of subsistence budgets and a tax rate that had barely changed in fifty years had taken its toll. Once an award-winning institution, the library's per capita revenue had fallen to less than half the state standard, and the library was well below state standards in such vital areas as books per capita, total staff, and service hours. The library had not had a book budget since 1987 and was forced to rely on donations to buy books. To make ends meet, it had to close on Fridays and cut staff, including a literacy coordinator position, in its six branches that dot the seventy-mile length of Bayou Lafourche.

Although the need was evident, the outcome was far from certain in this era of taxpayer concern about government spending. A neighboring parish had lost a similar referendum just months before, after waging an all-out publicity campaign (which some felt had backfired by bringing out the anti-tax vote). But on July 19 the Lafourche voters came through—by just 29 votes. As a result, the library's annual budget will more than double. Library director Kathleen Kilgen is planning to hire another literacy coordinator, become more involved in workplace literacy, and meet a long list of deferred needs. "This brings us into the 21st century," she said, "kind of bypassing the 20th century."

B. Demise of special federal funding

Several Viburnum sites experienced an upheaval in funding when the U.S. Congress discontinued library literacy grants under Title VI of LSCA. Title VI authorized $35,000 competitive grants to local libraries (plus some grants to states) specifically for literacy programs. These grants were a shot in the arm, enabling libraries to build up a tutoring program or hire a literacy coordinator. But the grants ended after fiscal year 1995. In a commu-

nity like Socorro, New Mexico, the loss of Title VI forced the literacy council to cut the hours of its already part-time staff and close its offices a few days a week, until it got a VISTA volunteer.

The loss of Title VI spurred some states to step up their state support for literacy programs. For example, the Oklahoma legislature took a major step this year by appropriating $300,000 for volunteer literacy programs, more than the state had received under Title VI. The majority of this funding is being used for grants to community-based and library-based literacy councils for adult or family literacy programs.

3. State and Federal Policies for Libraries and Literacy

Federal and state policies can actively promote library literacy efforts or tacitly discourage them. Relevant policies include those pertaining to library services, library governance, state agency roles, and adult education.

A. Implementation of LSTA

Local coordinators wondered how the transition to the new Library Services and Technology Act would influence library-based literacy programs. The answer is not yet clear because state libraries are just starting to implement these changes and federal administration of library programs has just moved from the U.S. Department of Education to the Institute for Museum and Library Services. LSTA funds, which total $136 million for fiscal year 1997, go out to states as block grants, and states have much say over how to distribute and use them.

As already noted, technology is the main focus of the law, but literacy needs are also mentioned. One of the five purposes of the Act is "to promote targeted library services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to individuals with disabilities, and to people with limited functional literacy or information skills" (section 212). In addition, each state must use some of its LSTA funding to target library and information services "to persons having difficulty using a library and to underserved urban and rural communities" (section 231(a)(2)). Some state LSTA plans offer clues to how states might address these goals. The New Mexico plan, for example, states that services to underserved populations and areas "must continue to utilize most of the resources received under the LSTA for at least this initial five year period." A priority in the Oklahoma plan is to "promote literacy services through family literacy, literacy legislation, workplace literacy, and literacy for the homeless, institutionalized, and non-English speaking." Mississippi's plan includes an objective to develop a statewide family literacy program in fiscal year 2000. Whether these kinds of statements will translate into significant support for library-based literacy programs (or for rural libraries) will depend on subsequent decisions made by states and by local libraries, and these will be influenced at least in part by whether local people are effective advocates for literacy services.

B. Library governance

Library literacy programs are also shaped by state policies about how public libraries are established and governed. Public libraries in Mississippi and Louisiana are generally organized into countywide, regional, or parishwide systems. Both Oklahoma and Texas have a mixture of city, town, and county-governed libraries, but in Texas these local library divisions belong to one of ten regional systems that administer state aid and provide supplemental services.

New Mexico is an interesting case of how governance issues affect library services. Reflecting the tradition of decentralized governance that prevails across much of the rural West, most of New Mexico's 73 public libraries were established to serve a particular town or city, not a county, and they do not maintain branch libraries. But in reality, they often serve much larger areas. The public library in Socorro, New Mexico, is the only full-service library across a two-county region of more than 12,000 square miles (although a few villages have small, developing libraries and other areas have state-funded bookmobile service). The libraries we visited in New Mexico were trying to respond to the needs of their outlying areas, but they did not have the budget or the mandate to do so, and the distances often made it difficult. In addition, county governments were not always eager to provide funds to a library that ostensibly was not "theirs." Consequently, many people in New Mexico who could benefit from family literacy cannot find a program within a reasonable distance from their home. Some local libraries in New Mexico are exploring regional alliances, but their efforts are in the very early stages.

C. Roles of state libraries and literacy offices

Because they are often far from centers of decisionmaking and lack the staff to keep abreast of changing policies, rural libraries and literacy providers depend a great deal on state guidance, leadership, and support. State libraries provide technical assistance, training, consulting services, and funding to local public libraries. Most of the local librarians we interviewed said their state library was quite helpful, whether they sought advice on a family reading curriculum or an update on state legislation. "The state is my mainline," said a librarian in a small New Mexico town, and her feelings were echoed by people in other states.

The five states also have state offices that coordinate literacy programs and policies and serve as the State Literacy Resource Centers, even though federal funding for these centers has ended. These include the Louisiana Governor's Office of Lifelong Learning, the Mississippi Governor's Office for Literacy, the Coalition for Literacy in New Mexico, the Oklahoma Literacy Resource Office, and the Texas Literacy Resource Center. The Oklahoma office is an actual division of the state library, while the others have various kinds of cooperative relationships with state libraries. Some of these offices administer their own grants, while others, as in Mississippi,

play more of a coordinating or leadership role. Many local literacy coordinators and librarians said they relied heavily on these offices for advice, training, and in some cases funding.

The New Mexico Coalition for Literacy, for example, has an annual budget of about $400,000 and makes grants to local literacy providers for materials and program operations. It also sponsors a host of training opportunities, provides technical assistance, lends materials to local programs, oversees a statewide literacy hotline, and even sponsors a "literacy theater" to raise public awareness through live presentations. Family literacy is a growing emphasis for the Coalition, according to executive director Michelle Jaschke. "Virtually all our funded programs have a family literacy component," she said, "and we're doing family literacy training at almost every regional meeting."

Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas also have state Centers for the Book. Affiliated with the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, these state Centers aim to stimulate public interest in books, reading, libraries, and literacy.

D. Adult education and other literacy programs

Local libraries and literacy councils are also affected by state and federal agencies for K-12 education, labor, and human services. On one hand, involvement with these other agencies can bring more funding, visibility, and program opportunities to libraries and literacy providers; on the other hand, it can create extra administrative headaches and open new areas for controversy and politicization.

The largest, oldest, and most influential of these systems is adult education, funded mainly through the federal Adult Education Act (which this year totals $336 million). In Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, adult education is administered by the state education agency; in New Mexico and Mississippi, it is overseen by the division for community colleges. At the local level, the vast majority of these funds go to school districts or community colleges. Several Viburnum grantees were involved with the primary local adult education provider as a partner or a subcontractor. In some sites these relationships were very positive, while in other places they were strained. The positive models confirm that it is possible to work out arrangements that share responsibilities and funding between traditional adult education agencies and the voluntary literacy and library sector, while delivering a full spectrum of adult education services.

The federal Even Start program, with a 1997 budget of $102 million, is the largest federal program specifically for family literacy. Even Start is administered by state education agencies and implemented through partnerships of public schools, adult education providers, and others. Although the libraries we studied were not involved in Even Start projects, the program is important as a source of models for family literacy with all components and as another option for local collaboration. It should be noted, however, that Even Start does not address pre-school learners, who, in light of recent brain research, would appear to be a prime target group for emergent literacy and

language development.

Viburnum sites were also waiting to see what would come of President Clinton's "America Reads" proposal, which was pending in Congress as we went to press. The President has proposed spending $2.75 billion over five years to hire reading specialists and train volunteers to ensure that all American children read well by the end of third grade. The bill would require states, in carrying out these programs, to build on existing literacy and family literacy initiatives and to work with other agencies, including libraries and literacy organizations. At the local level, funds would be distributed to local consortia that included a school district and at least one other organization, such as a library or literacy provider. Several state and local librarians and literacy coordinators told us they hoped to become involved with America Reads.

Some Viburnum sites received funding (as well as more requirements to meet) through the federal Job Training Partnership Act and other labor-administered programs. But the impact of these programs wanes in comparison to welfare reform, discussed in the next section.

4. Welfare Reform

Perhaps no policy engendered as much discussion and uncertainty among our sites as the new federal welfare reform law (Public Law 104-193), which states were required to implement by July 1 of 1997. Almost half of the adults on welfare do not have a high school diploma, and literacy programs are gearing up for major impacts. Many observers, including the National Institute for Literacy, expect welfare reform to increase demand for literacy services, while narrowing the kinds of services that can be provided and shortening the time allowed for completion.

The new law requires people who have been on public assistance for two years to spend at least 20 hours weekly either working at a job, participating in on-the-job training, doing community service, or caring for the children of community service participants. Those who don't will lose their support checks. States must annually increase the percentage of welfare recipients engaged in one of these work components from 25 percent in fiscal year 1997 to 50 percent in fiscal year 2002. Vocational training can count toward these work requirements for up to 20 percent of the state's welfare population, with a 12-month time limit on training. Congress was considering changes to some of these requirements as we went to press.

States receive welfare reform funds in the form of block grants and define which kinds of education and training meet the work requirements. States can also set more stringent welfare policies than the federal law. Thus, a key issue for literacy programs is whether adult basic education, GED preparation, or adult components of family literacy will count as work components.

With the implementation of welfare reform, the education program for mothers on public assistance in Allen Parish, Louisiana, shifted from a

basic literacy program to a "go get a job class," as library director Paige Hanchey explained. The classes are funded by the Office of Family Security, and the Allen Parish Library helps to design the curriculum and provides personnel and materials. In keeping with state and federal requirements for welfare recipients to work 20 hours a week or participate in work-related training, the program stopped emphasizing adult literacy, parenting education, and family literacy, and began focusing on job training, work readiness, and self-esteem building. As of May 1, 1997, participants in this revamped program are being trained primarily for custodial and housekeeping jobs at the Coushatta Indian reservation casino, and for cashier, clerk, and stock manager jobs in other businesses. The only literacy instruction was to reinforce reading and math skills used in specific jobs. A library-sponsored family literacy component, called Parents as Partners in Reading, was no longer being provided, although the relevant videos and materials were still available for people to check out of the library.

The new welfare requirements leave little time or money for basic literacy and family literacy, since these activities would not count toward the mandatory 20 hours in places like Allen Parish. Some of the librarians and literacy coordinators we talked with wondered how this diminished attention to general literacy will affect people's ability to keep a job, as well as their quality of life.

In New Mexico, the adult education arm of the Valencia County Literacy Council, at a local branch of the University of New Mexico, is ready to go with welfare reform. The college has applied for block grant funds from the Department of Human Services to deal with an expected impact of 1,200 new adult education clients. The college has designed a two-track program of general employability skills and specific job training, and is excited about the Department of Labor establishing an office at the college. But some other literacy providers in New Mexico and the other four states were not as optimistic about their capacity to meet rising demands for services among welfare recipients, especially without additional funding.

CONCLUSION

"It's a never-ending drawing board thing."
—A family literacy coordinator in Louisiana

Through a critical examination of our funding mission, and through site visits to the communities that participated in the Viburnum Family Literacy Project, the Viburnum Foundation has learned a great deal about the connections between the grantmaking process and what goes on within the communities involved. We also have strengthened and reinvigorated our commitment to both libraries and family literacy, and we hope that by sharing our experience other funders will see the benefits of supporting libraries as centers for intergenerational and lifelong learning. In this concluding chapter, we reiterate the reasons why libraries and literacy programs are critical to the health of our society, and we outline some of the more difficult challenges they will face in the near future.

1. Why Libraries?

Libraries belong to several different spheres of society. First, they are most definitely cultural institutions: repositories of history, art, and literature, often architecturally significant, and usually with exhibit or performance space for public art included in their design. Second, they are most certainly educational institutions, and they are career centers, and literacy labs, and computer centers, and parenting resource centers as well. Third, they are an extremely important central clearinghouse for information in this information-obsessed age. Finally, they are one of the only surviving public connections between the displaced or disenfranchised—the newly arrived immigrant or the recently laid-off worker or the single mother living in poverty—and the mainstream flow of American culture. Libraries represent a lot of the most treasured American values: equality, opportunity, freedom, and an urge to be mobile, out in the world, learning and growing and accumulating experience, whether within the pages of a book or on a computer screen or in a classroom or a lecture hall. They are a space that feeds and nurtures the American individual, and at the same time works for the benefit of American communities and the society at large, even the world.

All of the different spheres that are served by the library need to be acknowledged as libraries plan for the future. Libraries need to preserve and

maintain their physical space and resources as well as their virtual capacities, and they need to continue to serve as beacons of citizenship in a democratic society. The Viburnum Foundation's grant programs have been efforts to help both communities and library professionals work toward their vision of what a public library can and should be.

2. Why Family Literacy?

If a child arrives in school with a relationship to both spoken and written language already established, then that child is off and running. There are many hurdles ahead, but that child at least has left the block. So how to establish such a relationship? Once we recognize that the key to literacy lies in early childhood, before children enter school, then we also must recognize the importance of adult literacy, because it is adults who model literacy for children in those crucial years. With this understanding, a multi-generational approach to literacy is no more than common sense.

For better or for worse, literacy is an index of social and individual identity in our society. People with low literacy skills are often identified by their employers, co-workers, neighbors, family members, and by themselves as well, as inadequate or deficient members of society. Low literacy skills are often perceived as a cause of poverty, when they are more apt to be a result of poor educational systems that have prevented the proper mental and emotional development of several generations, and the other limited opportunities that accompany poverty. At the same time, literacy is too often directly linked to social position, or placed in the context of a job identity. The new kind of "literacy" instruction that is an offshoot of welfare reform might include, for example, classes on how to be a cashier or a chambermaid; classes on how to dress for a job interview, how to be on time, how to shop on a budget, or how to balance your checkbook. These classes have a lot more to do with conforming to a set of cultural standards than they have to do with literacy, and they suggest that those who do not possess literacy therefore do not possess culture—that they are blank slates. But people are rich with culture, with language, with history, with individual dreams and expectations, regardless of how well they read and write.

Just as a lack of literacy skills doesn't imply a lack of culture or individuality, the possession of literacy skills doesn't guarantee a positive social identity. Unfortunately, literacy doesn't mean that you suddenly get a job, health care, and a mortgage, or that you can suddenly burst through barriers erected against women, African-Americans, Indians, Latinos, immigrants, or the poor. It's not a bridge between classes, or a path out of poverty, or a magic potion. But it does represent a host of new choices and opportunities—it means more room to move, more roads to take, more ladders to climb.

The many misconceptions in the air about adult literacy and about illiterate adults may be one reason why the support provided by governments and the philanthropic community for literacy has been weak and sporadic. Overall, the consensus among literacy professionals is that in a

society accustomed to the rhetoric of progress and invention, Americans have expected a quick and easy solution to the problem of low literacy. When that solution does not appear they quickly tire of hearing about the problem.*

One way to circumvent this apathy may be to take a more positive, less targeted approach on the national level that promotes lifelong learning as a ongoing goal for everyone, not only for those who lack basic English reading and writing skills. As the link between early childhood learning and later development is more firmly and more scientifically established, more and more Americans of every socioeconomic sector are becoming concerned about finding time and opportunity for family learning. Intergenerational literacy should be conceptualized not as a band-aid designed to cover the loss of entitlement programs or social services, but as an important element of American life that can be institutionalized and made available to all as a complement to school-based education.

3. Toward a long-term strategy for family literacy

We see several areas that educators, librarians, policymakers, and funders need to explore in order to develop an effective long-term strategy for breaking the cycle of illiteracy.

A. English as a Second Language

More work needs to be done to expand ESL for adults into a comprehensive family program that goes beyond classroom offerings. Although the need for ESL was high in many communities we looked at, and although several sites had ESL tutoring or classes for adults, only a few had incorporated ESL into their family literacy programs. We saw that in some cases—usually where there was a well-educated and literate non-English speaking population, as in a high-tech or university setting—ESL was an easy attention-grabber that drew funds, staff, and volunteers away from people who needed basic adult literacy services. In other cases—usually when a relatively homogeneous community was hit with a sudden influx of immigrants, due to new jobs or a factory's relocation—libraries and literacy programs lacked the knowledge and experience to handle the needs of ESL learners. For example, it is questionable whether literacy instruction *in English* is an effective way to help people who are not literate in their *first* language, yet this was often the first step that libraries took in reaction to new immigrants.

Immigrants can find many other resources in the library besides ESL materials and instruction, and studies show that immigrants in metropolitan areas like New York and Los Angeles make extensive use of library facilities for information about employment, health care, and education, among other things. In rural communities, however, there can be obstacles between the information in the library and non-English speaking patrons, and rural

* See Spangenberg, Gail (1996) *Even Anchors Need Lifelines: Public Libraries in Adult Literacy.* New York: Spangenberg Learning Resources

librarians often lack the training to help new immigrants, or to stock bilingual materials. Central urban libraries, state libraries, and library organizations need to make training, materials, and other resources easily available to isolated rural librarians. Grant programs like Viburnum's that partner libraries with other community organizations can also help in making the rural library more open to those for whom English is a foreign language.

B. Public Library Systems

The special contributions that libraries bring to literacy have little relevance in places where the nearest library is 75 miles away. Therefore, a long-term strategy for family literacy must also include strong, continuing efforts to expand library services to underserved rural areas. Tiny or isolated communities generally cannot solve this problem alone; they need services and support from a larger system, whether a regional consortium or a county system. States have an important role to play in this effort; for example, they can encourage regional alliances and provide funding to strengthen services to underserved areas.

C. Technology and Literacy

Technology is bringing more resources to libraries and a world of information to rural residents. But the rush toward technology may also mean that money and attention are diverted from other aspects of libraries, like books and human resources. Family literacy encompasses a range of experiences, only some of which can be delivered through technology. A child and parent lingering over a book, a circle of children listening raptly to a storyteller, a roomful of families laughing and sharing as they learn a different language—the survival of these experiences depends on libraries finding the right balance between the virtual and the palpable. It also depends on policymakers who understand that funding for technology does not have to be in direct competition with funding for literacy, but that the two can coexist.

D. Elementary and Secondary Education

In contrast to the stereotype of the rural adult learner as an older farmer or field worker whose education stopped at the eighth grade, many participants in Viburnum family literacy programs were younger people who had attended high school, including some who had graduated. Family literacy programs alone cannot break the cycle of illiteracy for these young adults and their children. A long-term strategy must also include improvements in elementary and secondary education, so that no student graduates without being able to read well. Major reforms of K-12 education are already underway in most states and school districts. Their success will depend on strong backing from citizens, continuing support at home from parents, and adequate funding and sustained attention from policymakers.

E. Public Policy

Finally, public policy must be shaped with the recognition that becoming a confident, competent reader entails much more than learning decoding skills. It means developing habits of mind that lead from inquiry through discovery to application and linkage with other ideas old and new. Whether the concerns are those of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, or Juvenile Justice and Crime Prevention, policy makers must come to the conviction that the mind disciplined by reading will be the essential success factor of the 21st century, as it has been of preceding centuries.

4. The Next Chapter

The Viburnum Family Literacy Project is beginning a new phase, to be administered by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, with Virginia Mathews as Project Coordinator. In the next phase, we will be incorporating the findings of our evaluation process, and expanding the project into more states. We look forward to many more years of promoting family literacy in libraries.

APPENDIX A: Project History

In 1992 the Office of Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) at the American Library Association developed a proposal for a Rural Family Literacy Grant Program at the request of the Viburnum Foundation. The program was administered by Mattye Nelson, then Director of OLOS, and Carolyn De Bonnett for the next four years.

Year One
June 1992: VF approved a grant of **$35,000**, $14,000 to go to ALA for administration and $21,000 to go to 7 libraries in Louisiana for programs.
Summer, 1993: Grants went out to **6 libraries** in Louisiana.

Year Two
June 1993: VF approved a grant of **$50,000**, $32,000 to go to ALA and $18,000 directly to libraries.
Summer 1994: Grants went out to **6 libraries** in Louisiana.

Year Three
June 1994: VF approved a grant of **$75,312,** $39,312 to go to ALA and $36,000 to go to libraries.
Summer 1995: Grants were paid to **13 libraries**. One of these was money that had been returned by one of the 1993 grantees. The sites were:

5 in Louisiana
3 in Texas
3 in New Mexico
2 in Oklahoma

Year Four
June 1995: VF approved a grant of **$100,000**, $46,000 to go to ALA and $54,000 to go directly to libraries.
Spring 1996: Grants were paid to **18 libraries**:

4 in Louisiana
3 in Texas
3 in New Mexico
4 in Oklahoma
4 in Mississippi

Year Five
July 1997 the Viburnum Foundation paid renewal grants of $3000 each directly to **16 libraries:**

6 in Louisiana
3 in Mississippi
4 in New Mexico
2 in Oklahoma
1 in Texas

One 1996 grant was returned.

Year Six

Starting in the fall of **1997**, a new Viburnum Family Literacy Project will get underway, administered by the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. Virginia Mathews will coordinate the project.

This new program will consist of a **$75,000** grant to the Center for the Book for development and administration of the project, on-site training, and technical assistance (to be offered partially through the state Center for the Book where applicable). An additional **$100,000** will be distributed to the individual libraries involved in the program in the form of direct grants from the Viburnum Foundation. Most of these grants will continue to be for $3000, but some larger grants will be issued as a part of the new program. The program will expand into other states.

APPENDIX B: Viburnum Family Literacy Project Sites and Contacts

*current site

LOUISIANA

*Allen Parish Library, Oberlin
—*Paige Hanchey, Library Director: (318) 639-4315*
*Assumption Parish Library, Napoleonville
—*Mary Judice, Administrative Librarian: (504) 369-7070*
*Beauregard Parish Library, DeRidder
—*Patricia Holmes, Literacy Coordinator: (318) 463-6217*
Catahoula Parish Library, Harrisonburg
Concordia Parish Library, Ferriday
Franklin Parish Library, Winnsboro
Winn Parish Library, Winnifield
*LaFourche Parish Library, Thibodaux
—*Kathleen Kilgen, Library Director: (504) 446-1163*
Shreve Memorial Library, Shreveport
*South St. Landry Community Library, Sunset
—*Elizabeth Pellerin, Library Director: (318) 662-3442*
Terrebonne Parish Library, Houma
*West Baton Rouge Parish Library, Port Allen
—*Judy Boyce, Children's Services Librarian: (504) 342-7920*

MISSISSIPPI

*Bolivar County Literacy Center, Cleveland
—*Wanda Pearcy, Literacy Coordinator: (601) 843-2774*
*Copiah-Jefferson Regional Library, Hazlehurst
—*Paul Cartwright, Library Director: (601) 894-1681*
Long Beach Public Library, Long Beach
*Waveland Library Literacy Center, Waveland.
—*Donna Hutchings, Literacy Coordinator (601) 467-9240*

NEW MEXICO

Bloomfield Community Library, Bloomfield
*El Rito Public Library, El Rito
—*Ginger Legato, Librarian: (505) 581-4608*
*Socorro Public Library and LVA, Socorro
—*Valerie Moore, Literacy Coordinator: (505) 835-4659*

*Schlientz Memorial Library, Tucumcari
—*Clara Rey, Library Director: (505) 461-0295*
*Valencia County Literacy Council, Belen
—*Boleslo Lovato, Literacy Coordinator: (505) 864-7797*

OKLAHOMA

*Anadarko Community Library, Anadarko
—*Christina Owen, Library Director: (405) 247-7351*
Guymon Public Library, Guymon
*Johnston County Library and Literacy Council, Tishomingo
—*Renee Yocum: (405) 371-3006*
*McClain County Literacy Project and Purcell Public Library, Purcell
—*Ronda Lehew, Literacy Services Coordinator: (405) 321-1481*

TEXAS

*Decatur Public Library, Decatur
—*Mary McClure, Library Director: (940) 627-5512*
Briargate Elementary School, Missouri City
Joe A. Hall High School & Community Library, Venus
Teinert Memorial Public Library, Bartlett
Richards Memorial Library, Brady

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CONTRIBUTORS

Tracy Kerr, member of the evaluation team, is Coordinator of the International Literacy Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught English as a Second Language in Taiwan, Cambodia, and South Africa, where she also designed English language educational and reading development materials for disadvantaged students entering university. She is currently pursuing graduate studies in language and literacy at the University of Pennsylvania.

Nancy Kober, member of the evaluation team and co-author, is a freelance writer, editor, and consultant based in Charlottesville, Virginia, who specializes in education. She is the author or co-author of more than two dozen publications, including *What We Know about Science Teaching and Learning*. In recent years, she has done writing and consulting work for the U.S. Department of Education, the National Academy of Sciences, and many other education groups, and was an editor and contractor for *Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime*, the 1993 national study of adult literacy conducted by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment. From 1975 to 1987, she dealt with federal adult education legislation and other education policy issues as a legislative specialist with the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Molly Turner, a member of the evaluation team and co-author, is Executive Director of the Viburnum Foundation. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she is finishing a doctoral dissertation about the politics of landscape and culture in New Mexico, for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia. She has been a literacy tutor in both Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Charlottesville, Virginia. She serves on the board of the Fund for America's Libraries.